

まおゆう魔王勇者

④ この手でできること 著／橙乃ままれ



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The Song of the Nameless Bard

The feud between the **Humans and Demons**

the **Demon King and the Hero** tried to kill each other.

To turn around the **rules of the world**

to see the **other side of the hill**

the Demon King and the Hero **joined hands**.

To destroy the way of the world.

Some Demons turned their backs against the Demon King,

while the new Demons who worked with Humans, carried the name of the **Tribe of the Gate**.

Beginning with the Tribe of the Demons of the Pale, led by the Demon King candidate, **the Sigiled King**,

these Demons left in **Betrayal**, joining hands with the Central Continent and marching into the Human World.

The Kingdoms of the South received **Embassy** from the Demons,

along with the merchants who sought profit, and tried to link Demons with Humans.

The Elder Sister Maid, having become a scholar, sought to unravel the ways of the world.

As the Spirit wills!

The massed serfs of the Central Continent took to the battlefield with their **Muskets**.

without regard for Humans nor Demons, they betrayed the Demons of the Pale, pushing South, to reclaim the **Holy Relic**, they sprayed the field with blood.

The other side of the hill, that the Demon King and Hero fought to see,

is it now to be this unbridled **World War**?!

Those who have met the Demon King, working to change the world.

For despite their disappointment, there is another side of the hill to see.

Chapter 1, “The Rainbow is Dipping.”

— The Kingdom of Metal, the Palace, in a Heated Room

The Lone Winter King: “—After that, how are the people?”

Marshal of Metal: “Yes. Right now... Maybe it’s because of the celebratory mood, but there doesn’t seem to be too many hard feelings about the end of the battle.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “Good.”

The Iron Fist King: “Is that so.”

The Lone Winter King: “To the people, we have managed to protect the land.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “Though the pain and anguish incurred is terrible.”

The Iron Fist King: “The pain is one thing, but our integrity is another.”

The Lone Winter King: “That’s right. The number of soldiers the Crusaders from the Central Continent can field is far above our expectations. If we incurred even the same number of sacrifices, the pain would be too great for us to even sustain our society.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “All we can do is try to reconstruct.”

The Iron Fist King: “It’s people. Whether it’s battle or reconstruction, it all rests on the numbers. Without people, we can’t start to do anything.”

The Lone Winter King: “We are now in a limited-scale war, so the number of casualties...”

The Iron Fist King: “There are approximately 3,500. —To break it down further, the Kingdom of Metal and the Kingdom of Winter have lost roughly 1,500 apiece.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “I apologise for the burden we have placed on you.”

The Iron Fist King: “You will bear the burden in other ways, and this is the land of the Kingdom of Metal after all.”

The Lone Winter King: “We will ship food from our lands first. The families of the casualties must also be cared for. With the change of seasons, we should also plan for the export of charcoal.”

The Iron Fist King: “—More importantly...”

The Lone Winter King: “Mmm.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “The Holy Crusaders still control the Kingdom of White Night.”

The Iron Fist King: “That’s...”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “According to my hand — a courtier of mine known as the Disciple Nobleman has submitted a report. The Crusaders are regrouping and conducting exercises.”

The Iron Fist King: “Damn...”

The Lone Winter King: “We have to be prepared for the possibility of another attack.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “Or we could take to the sea.”

The Iron Fist King: “Hmm...”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “They must have brought quite a bit to attack the Southern Alliance. If another conflict breaks out along the border between the Kingdom of White Night and the Kingdom of Metal, that would leave the Central Continent as a completely exposed and defenceless trap.”

The Iron Fist King: “But can’t we wait for these Crusaders to disband?”

The Lone Winter King: “No, we can’t. Our reports indicate that this Expedition was put together with the direct sanction of the Primarch himself. As a result, disbanding it before it has achieved its goals would send a terrible message from the Holy Church. The Crusaders have no way of giving up without achieving their goals.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “In that case...”

The Iron Fist King: “It’s a stalemate.”

The Lone Winter King: “That is a blessing. We need time.”

The Iron Fist King: “To heal the wounds of war.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “It’s not just that. — Please remember the conversation we had with the envoy of the Demon World. We have to make a decision as soon as possible. For that purpose, Iron Fist King, you too...”

The Iron Fist King: “I understand! But I still remember what it was like to fight those Demons. As the King, I will have to swallow my reservations in the name of peace for my people!”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “...”

The Lone Winter King: “Do you mean to say some of the punitive force sent to attack the Demons of the Pale are still here?”

The Iron Fist King: “Yeah.”

The Lone Winter King: “...Hmm.”

The Iron Fist King: “I will go and confirm just how things are. Everything else will follow.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “Yeah... We’ll be counting on you then, Iron Fist King.”

The Iron Fist King: “Hmm. — An unclouded heart makes the best decision, does it not? I understand.”

——— The Kingdom of the Lake, the City of the Lake, Field Headquarters of the Union

Union Employee: “A message! The Southern Kingdoms have come under surprise attack from the Holy Crusaders of the Central Continent!”

Female Union Employee: “!”

Branch Chief: “...We were late.”

Union Employee: “Yes.”

Female Union Employee: “We couldn’t make it in time...”

Branch Chief: “We didn’t manage the crackdown on the supply of metal in time. They were able to coordinate their logistics in absolute silence, I fear they may have planned this much further in advance than we thought... If it wasn’t for that, it would have been far too strange that there was no reaction from them despite the wavering of the metal prices.”

Union Employee: “That means we couldn’t affect their production of armaments.”

Female Union Employee: “At this rate, we’ve suffered terrible economic wounds. Shouldn’t we be looking for an opening to retreat?”

Branch Chief: “...”

Union Employee: “I am sorry. We should have gained a practical grasp of things earlier.”

Branch Chief: “No. This was an issue of intelligence from the very beginning. It seems that there are still many spheres of the economy which are beyond our intelligence and understanding.”

Door opens.

Young Merchant: “...My, my. You are all still here.”

Union Employee: “Councillor!”

Branch Chief: “When did you return?”

Young Merchant: “Only just. I had to leave the City of the Gate.”

The Mage: “...”

Union Employee: “Umm, this is?”

Young Merchant: "Oh right. Please bring lots of food and some sweets."

The Mage: "...*Smiles.*"

Young Merchant: "Right... Situation report."

Union Employee: "We've only just received a report that the Southern United Kingdoms have come under attack from the Crusaders of the Central Continent... They are using some new weaponry from the Central Continent."

Young Merchant: "Would that be muskets?"

The Mage: "...Yeah."

Young Merchant: "Do you have a better understanding by any chance?"

The Mage: "...At first, the Southern United Kingdoms were engaged in battle against the Tribe of the Demons of the Pale which was controlling the Kingdom of White Night. The Female Paladin, acting as the Supreme Commander, assembled 7,000 men on the border of the Kingdoms of Metal and White Night. The Tribe of the Pale met them on the field with 20,000 soldiers and the battle continued for a day. However, both sides were suddenly faced with a strong assault by approximately 40,000 Holy Crusaders from the rear... Their main targets were the Demons of the Pale, but they did not make a distinction during the attack. The bulk of the force was comprised of fresh recruits armed with muskets. A contingent under the Female Paladin had prepared a fire attack across the marshlands, and they used this to retreat from the Plains of Scilla. The Holy Crusaders were also prevented from advancing by this sea of fire, and they moved to seize the Kingdom of White Night from the Demons of the Pale. Having swept the city, they garrisoned there.

...At present, even though the military situation is tense, there is a semblance of ceasefire. Moreover, the 20,000 strong Tribe of the Pale force has been completely exterminated. The Southern United Kingdoms have lost roughly 3,000 while the Holy Crusaders have lost 6,000. However, if one were to consider the attrition rate, then the Southern United Kingdoms have lost 30% of participating forces and 12% of the entire armed forces; the Holy Crusaders have lost 15% of participating forces but losses for the entire armed forces do not exceed 3%."

Young Merchant: "In that case, the Holy Crusaders..."

The Mage: "Moreover, there are more than 20,000 additional soldiers being trained to arrive as reinforcements."

Young Merchant: "The Southern United Kingdoms are at the verge of extinction..."

The Mage: "That would be a premature judgment. There are two reasons. Firstly, the Holy Crusaders seem to have set the priority at attacking the Demon World rather than attacking the Southern United Kingdoms."

Young Merchant: “Hmm... It’s true that the general polemic of the Church and the mandate of the Crusaders have been directed at this, but...I don’t believe they would just allow the Southern United Kingdoms to exist.”

The Mage: “...This is just an inference, but I believe the Holy Crusaders can exterminate the Southern Kingdoms with just a third of their massive army. In other words, they would easily be able to enact strategies like pincer attacks.”

Union Employee: “With 20,000 soldiers, there are such possibilities...”

Young Merchant: “And the next point is?”

The Mage: “Right after the start of the war, the Southern Tripartite Economic Union gave up on that name. With the addition of the Kingdom of the Lake, the Kingdom of Elm, the Kingdom of Reeds, the Kingdom of Red Horses, and seven Free Trading Cities, they have founded the Southern Alliance.”

Branch Chief: “Finally, eh?”

Young Merchant: “With the present timing, there are other considerations outside of this. The way it is... 20,000 soldiers is definitely an impressive force for the Church to muster, but mobilising such a large force will probably result in the weakening of the national forces in each of the Kingdoms. Of course, it’s not like the countries under the Holy Church of Light are willing to fight as a cohesive force. To begin with, even if they wanted to fight, the bulk of their fighting forces, having been dispatched on the Crusades, would be incapable of mounting a strong self-defence. With this many troops out of the Central Continent, the establishment of the Southern Alliance is sure to shake up the balance.”

Female Union Employee: “Right now, in the event that the Holy Crusaders were to launch an attack on the Southern Alliance, a country closer to the Central Continent — for example, the Kingdom of the Lake or the Kingdom of Elm — might respond by launching a retaliatory attack on the less guarded kingdoms of the Central Continent. Even though the peasants form the core of the Crusader armies, their military support and coordination is definitely being controlled by the nobility. They would definitely not be able to stand by and allow that to happen.”

Branch Chief: “It’s really a hostage taking situation on both sides...”

Union Employee: “That’s right. The Crusaders can use their massive military might to take the central portion of the Southern Alliance hostage. And in response, the newly expanded allies of the Southern Alliance can also take the undefended portions of the Central Continent hostage.”

Young Merchant: “That’s not it all of it, though... This is where it gets complicated.”

Female Union Employee: “?”

Young Merchant: “Both sides are actually in remarkably similar situations. On one hand, you have the Southern Alliance, which wields its promise of freedom for the

people as its weapon; hence they cannot afford to lose the trust that has been placed in them. On the other hand, you have the Central Continent, which wields the muskets of the people as its own weapon; they, in turn, cannot afford to have these muskets suddenly turned upon them... Both are in very difficult straits. Notwithstanding the efforts of the Union, the Demon Council, the Demon World..."

Union Employee: "...There is a chance of victory then?"

Young Merchant: "I cannot guarantee it. But if it were merely a contest of might, then there would be no room for intelligence to take the field. If situations weren't complicated, the merchants would not be able to capitalise on situations like we do. Because of this, we cannot abandon chance. On a board with many players, chaos is king, and that is the optimum battleground for us merchants."

Union Employee: "But right now the military strike has been..."

Young Merchant: "Yes, I know it has started. But it's still too early to say it has been decided. If the opposing side does not have specialised staff, then we may have a strong chance yet."

Union Employee: "Specialised..."

Young Merchant: "Logistics... What do we know about the Central Continent's secret musketsmiths?"

Union Employee: "Yes, they belong to the Kingdom of Metal. There are three locations in total."

Young Merchant: "Very good. Branch Chief, please move onto these three locations to prepare—"

Branch Chief: "Move?"

Young Merchant: "Inns and brothels... I want ears and eyes on the ground."

Branch Chief: "Understood."

Young Merchant: "Please get me intelligence on how many muskets the Crusaders have with them. No matter how well stocked they are, it would be ridiculous to think they would be able to procure 20,000 muskets for their 20,000 soldiers. Moreover, muskets are complex machines. They are prone to accidents and require a lot of materials in preparation. And they need gunpowder, don't they?"

The Mage: "...Yes. It is a crucial requirement."

Union Employee: "In other words, we can assume that a significant quantity of saltpetre would have had to be acquired by the Holy Empire... Their muskets have already been prepared, so applying any further pressure on their supply chain can't possibly have much effect, can it?"

Young Merchant: “No, there is an effect. Our enemies are the Kingdoms of the Central Continent. The enormity of it is in the weaponry, but it has its weaknesses. Any sort of necrosis along the chain can lead to a significant time lag.”

Union Employee: “Eh?”

Young Merchant: “Think about the itemisation of the production process of metal products. That’s where we’re going to strike.”

Union Employee: “...The production cost? But the leftover production cost will compose largely of labour costs. At present, the intensive factories and manufactories house all the craftsmen in private, and we would be hard-pressed to offer a better pitch under these circumstances.”

Young Merchant: “It’s not just about the production costs.”

Branch Chief: “I see!” *Claps.*

Young Merchant: “Yes, I’m talking about charcoal. In order to forge metal, you need double or even triple the amount of charcoal. And why wouldn’t they be able to use coal?”

Branch Chief: “We’ve already suppressed their supply of that.”

Young Merchant: “The wind is blowing in the right direction. The country that produces the majority of the charcoal for the Holy Empire, the Kingdom of Elm, has already joined the Southern Alliance. In this case, controlling the supply of charcoal would not be a difficult thing to do.”

Female Union Employee: “What about the capital involved?”

Young Merchant: “We’ll get it from the Central Continent. There are 200,000 people moving towards the Kingdom of White Night, these people need food to eat. All of this food needs to be shipped by the sea. We’ll profit from importing the food through the Free Cities and then distributing it to the ports of the Kingdom of White Night.”

Union Employee: “Understood! I’ll make the arrangements.”

Young Merchant: “Please begin.”

Female Union Employee: “Yeah.”

Branch Chief: “Got it.” *Runs off.*

Young Merchant: “Hmm... Will we make it in time?”

The Mage: “...Is it over?”

Young Merchant: “Yeah, somehow.”

The Mage: “...”

Young Merchant: “Hungry?”

The Mage nods.

Young Merchant: “Understood. I’ll go prepare something. Without your help, we would definitely have been too late. You really are the Mage of legend.”

The Mage: “...The present circumstance is a gift for that child.”

Young Merchant: “That child?”

The Mage: “That girl who could not be of the Tribe of the Library. That mere human.”

Young Merchant: “—”

The Mage: “...Nothing.”

Young Merchant: “I see.”

The Mage: “Why do you seek to end the conflict?”

Young Merchant: “For profit.”

The Mage raises her eyebrow.

Young Merchant: “The world that we live in is a place for us to make our profits. If we were allowed to just destroy it as we see fit, it would be very troublesome.”

The Mage: “...How individualistic.”

Young Merchant: “I am a merchant.”

The Mage: “...I feel the same way.”

Young Merchant: “Sorry?”

The Mage: “Nothing.”

Young Merchant: “But teleportation magic... I’m sure that would be really useful for many things.”

The Mage: “...Will you go back?”

Young Merchant: “No, I think I should stay here to direct the efforts for a while.”

The Mage: “...”

Young Merchant: “The City of the Gate? There’s a certain Lady over there, a high ranking personage. Someone who is willing to get lied to for her ends. I must factor her into my calculations.”

The Mage: “...As a lover?”

Young Merchant: "Please... Nothing of the sort. A merchant partnership is a far more sacred thing."

——— **The Kingdom of Winter, the Winter Palace, the Room of Accounts**

Disciple Merchant: "Aghh!"

Throws papers around.

Disciple Merchant: "What's going on! This has to be the evil machinations of some terrible party... Because of this war, the food situation has gotten really troublesome... Agh, it's tough to be an official. It's really terrible. I give up. I give up."

Assistant: "Disciple Merchant, sir!"

Disciple Merchant: "We've come to an impasse, eh... On the one hand, we have to create avenues for remittances, replenish our depleted stockpiles, issue and enforce the trade permits... We have a whole lot of things needed to be done."

Assistant: "Disciple Merchant, sir!"

Disciple Merchant: "Agh, what..."

Assistant: "Disciple Merchant, sir!"

Disciple Merchant: "It's all piling up, how despicable."

Assistant: "Disciple Merchant, sir!"

Disciple Merchant: "Oh. What is it, you doggie?"

Assistant: "I'm not a doggie!"

Disciple Merchant: "You're shaking your little tail, aren't you?"

Assistant: "What? — What are you talking about?!"

Disciple Merchant: "Well, what is it?"

Assistant: "That's right."

Disciple Merchant: "?"

Assistant: "I've solved your assignment!"

Disciple Merchant: "Assignment?"

Assistant: "The cheese!"

Disciple Merchant: "What about it?"

Assistant: “You asked me to consider how it would be possible to stabilise the price of cheese and provide it to the market at an affordable price range!”

Disciple Merchant: “Ohhh. That assignment. Sorry, there were too many issues with the Crusaders, I forgot all about such tiny details.”

Assistant: “How cruel! You’re just bullying me!”

Disciple Merchant: “Well, don’t say that. It’s almost time for tea anyway.”

Assistant: “I’ve already prepared it.”

Disciple Merchant: “Alright, let’s discuss this over tea.”

Assistant: “Yes!”

Sits down.

Assistant: “Firstly, I’ve looked into the production process for cheese.”

Disciple Merchant: “Very good, one must begin from the basics.”

Assistant: “To say it simply, cheese is a dairy product. Cheese is warmed, churned, and then fermenting agents are added. This fermenting agent is basically made from the *Thistle** flower. After that, the water content is pressed out once it has hardened. While adding heat and pressing out the water, the cheese is squeezed into a container to form the raw product. However, the product we are able to consume just begins at this stage, this raw cheese must be placed in brine; after this, the product is not finished until the taste is adjusted and the cheese is stored and matured in a cold and dark environment for a period ranging from many months to a few years... It takes time, but that’s how it’s done.”

Disciple Merchant: “What a troublesome process.”

Assistant: “It is! But it’s delicious. I’ve tasted a lot of it during my research.”

Disciple Merchant: “What a cheeky fellow!”

Assistant: “Hahaha.”

Disciple Merchant: “Well, looks like you’ve got the fundamentals down. What have you thought of next?”

Assistant: “Well, the first thing I thought of is that the quantity of product decreases remarkably during the transition from milk to cheese.”

Disciple Merchant: “Hmm... Well, but that’s to be expected, right? You have to squeeze out the water content, after all.”

Assistant: “Yes, that’s true, but just how much needs to be lost? I’ve gone and asked around, and it seems that if you prepared 10 pots of milk, you would only get 1 pot of cheese.”

Disciple Merchant: “One out of ten.”

Assistant: “But on the market, cheese fetches 30 times the price of milk at the same price. So a 10% reduction in final output is still profitable.”

Disciple Merchant: “Hmm, so in other words, the rest of it is comprised of labour costs, other materials, and transportation costs.”

Assistant: “Umm, there’s that, but a large part of it is spent on the maturation.”

Disciple Merchant: “Maturation...”

Assistant: “In other words, the cheese needs to mature in a cool and dark environment, right? From a farmer’s point of view, it is not possible to move the product immediately. In fact, it takes at least half a month to two years to make any profit. By that time, I’m not even sure if there even really is a net profit.”

Disciple Merchant: “Why not? Once he sells it, he still makes profit, doesn’t he?”

Assistant: “Well, because maturation takes time, you have to be especially careful that it doesn’t rot. Moreover, you can never be certain how the price of cheese will fluctuate in this time. And since people only make cheese because they want to sell it at a higher price, you will never find a cheesemaker willing to sell cheese at an affordable price... And that’s why they don’t produce enough cheese.”

Disciple Merchant: “Hmm.”

Assistant: “There are also those who produce enough cheese for their family and then sell the rest if there are any leftovers. That also means that not much is sold and the price is high.”

Disciple Merchant: “Very well researched.”

Assistant: “Ehehehe. Well, producing cheese is like... Umm... Like playing the lottery. So people aren’t certain of being able to profit from it.”

Disciple Merchant: “And so?”

Assistant: “And so, this is what I’ve thought of.”

Unfolds paper.

Explanation

Thistle: Cheese is produced through the coagulation of milk proteins obtained from animals. For this to be achieved, the enzyme needs to be added. In Europe, this rennet is usually obtained from the mulch in the stomachs of young sheep and mountain goats. However, there are forms of vegetable rennet such as from fig juice, artichokes (Korean

thistle) and thistle. This is especially widespread in the Iberian Peninsula throughout Spain and Portugal.

Assistant: “It’s all written down here, but...”

Disciple Merchant: “This is basically a storage unit?”

Assistant: “Yes... Umm, umm. Basically, we allow farmers to sell raw cheese for which salt has already been added to, but this will not yet have been allowed to mature at 60% of the sale price. In this way, people who want to produce cheese can obtain disposable capital within a few weeks of the milking, right?”

Disciple Merchant: “Indeed.”

Assistant: “The people who run this storage facility can maintain the necessary conditions and remove the cheese for sale at the preordained time. In this way, the storeowner of the storage facility would always have cheese ready for sale and would not require any expertise or tools to create it. In other words, they would just be taking care of the cheese.”

Disciple Merchant: “But if the cheese were to get infested or rotten during that time, it would be completely useless, wouldn’t it?”

Assistant: “Yes. And that’s why we buy it at 60% of the price. The remaining 40% is not really for us to gain profit, but rather to cover any accidents or...”

Disciple Merchant: “Risks?”

Assistant: “That’s the word. It covers our risks. The key is in numbers. In other words, if we build our storage facilities in many areas, the cheese can be kept in many areas as well, and that will lower our risk. It’s probable for any given unit of cheese to go bad or to turn out well and become delicious, right? For a small farming household, if a unit of cheese were to go bad, that could represent a significant portion of his income and he would not even have any milk to sell to replace it. However, even if 20% of all our cheese went bad, as long as the rest is fine, there would be no issue. That’s why, umm... If we bought the raw cheese at a price between that of milk and cheese, we would be able to balance out the losses that we could incur... Umm, did I say something strange?”

Disciple Merchant: “No, no, please continue.”

Assistant: “This price that we’ve been referring to is preliminarily set at 60%, but depending on the market price and any other impinging factors, it’s just an approximation. If the cheese has a high failure rate, then we will have to adjust the price further downwards. But if it has a high success rate, we can adjust it upwards, right? Umm, this...”

Disciple Merchant: “I see — What you’ve just come up with is a form of hedging. You envision what the success rate will be and stabilise our earnings based on that.”

Assistant: “Yes! The farming household now doesn’t have to worry about saving lots of money because they only need to worry about producing the first stage of the product, and so we can have entire farming communities devoted to cheese production!”

Disciple Merchant: “Is that so?”

Assistant: “But there’s more. At present, the price one can fetch from cheese is not so much dependent on the techniques of the farm or the deliciousness of the cheese, but rather on how much or how little cheese is produced. This is because it’s hard to differentiate good cheese by sight.”

Disciple Merchant: “I see, and what can you do?”

Assistant: “Well, in order to ensure good flavour, we can create a seal to be given to good cheese to certify their quality. Producers will then have to work hard if they want to maintain these standards, right?”

Disciple Merchant: “That’s not a bad idea.”

Assistant: “Hehehehe.”

Disciple Merchant: (I’m surprised by his practical ability. There are lots of holes in this plan, but he was able to combine risk-reduction with the division of labour. It’s worth a shot. He really has grown...)

Assistant: “What do you think?”

Disciple Merchant: “You’re really getting better!”

Assistant: “Am I? Am I? Is that a compliment!”

Disciple Merchant: “I’ll save my praise for the next assignment.”

Assistant: “...”

Disciple Merchant: “It’s a tough one... Boots.”

—— The Village of Wintering, the Manor of the Demon King, the Dining Room

The Demon King: “...”

The Hero: “...Demon King, salt.”

The Demon King: “Got it.”

The Hero: “...”

The Demon King: “Hey, Hero.”

The Hero: “What?”

The Demon King: “Why are we doing this?”

The Hero: “Well... The Demons of the Pale are retreating, so it’s a good time as any to go back home for a bit.”

The Demon King: “That’s not what I’m talking about. Why are we eating this?”

The Hero: “We don’t have anything else to eat.”

The Demon King: “What did we have last night?”

The Hero: “Boiled potatoes with salt?”

The Demon King: “And the night before?”

The Hero: “Boiled potatoes with salt.”

The Demon King: “...”

The Hero: “...”

The Demon King: “How did it come to this!”

The Hero: “We don’t have a choice! The Chief Maid was sent to be an envoy to the Council of the City of the Gate and the Little Sister Maid is on a learning trip to the Kingdom of Winter.”

The Demon King: “So we can only have boiled potatoes for three meals?”

The Hero: “But you made this, didn’t you?”

The Demon King: “I can’t really make anything else.”

The Hero: “Then we should just eat it.”

The Demon King: “When you made lunch you made the same thing too.”

The Hero: “That’s the only thing I can make, so I’ve got no choice either.”

The Demon King: “...We lose.”

The Hero: “...Sorry?”

The Demon King: “At this rate, we’re going to lose. For sure. The Demon World will be exterminated.”

The Hero: “What are you saying?”

The Demon King: “I have a premonition.”

The Hero: “...Whoa, that’s a really dark expression.”

The Demon King: “That’s right.”

The Hero: “What?”

The Demon King: “We’ve got some jam, right? Let’s put some on the potatoes so it’ll be sweeter.”

The Hero: “Say so earlier!”

Bonk. Spreads jam.

The Demon King: “...We will lose. The Demon World will be wiped out. Hero, I cannot go on any longer. And like this, 3,000 years will pass.”

The Hero: “That escalated quickly.”

The Demon King: “Throw all the books aside, let’s go to town.”

The Hero: “What?”

The Demon King: “I’m going to town! I can’t take it anymore! This meal is destroying my body and my brain! I’m the Demon King after all!”

The Hero: “Where to?”

The Demon King: “Let’s go somewhere right and proper.”

The Hero: “But you don’t know where.”

The Demon King: “Let’s just go somewhere, Hero!”

The Hero: “That was completely unhelpful... Ahh, there’s no choice.”

——— **The South of the Kingdom of Metal, the Forests**

Lieutenant of Metal: “Just up ahead.”

Scout: “Yes.”

The Iron Fist King: “...Hmph.”

Disciple Soldier: “Your Majesty, you appear to be bearing a difficult face.”

Lieutenant of Metal: “Indeed.”

The Iron Fist King: “...I was born with this face.”

Grass rustling.

Lieutenant of Metal: “Who goes!”

Herald of the Gate: “I am a herald of the Tribe of the Gate. Are you of the Kingdom of Metal?”

Disciple Soldier: “Yes, we are.”

Herald of the Gate: “We are now in contact, please come this way.”

Lieutenant of Metal: “...What a lively soldier.”

The Iron Fist King: “Hmph.”

Lieutenant of Metal: “Now, now, don’t make that face. — If you smile more, you’ll look like a kindly grandfather.”

The Iron Fist King: “What?”

Lieutenant of Metal: “Nothing at all.”

Herald of the Gate: “We are currently leasing this valley. Thank you for the friendship and assistance of the Kingdom of Metal on the battlefield.”

The Iron Fist King: “Hmph.”

Leaves rustling.

Herald of the Gate: “May I introduce the King of the Kingdom of Metal.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “Good work.”

Disciple Soldier: “Hmm.”

Lieutenant of Metal: (A man with an air of gravitas...)

The East Fortress Base Commander: “There are many courtesies I ought to extend to you, but perhaps we should adjourn to the pavilion.”

——— The South of the Kingdom of Metal, the Forests, the Pavilion of the Tribe of the Fang

Flap.

Lieutenant of Metal: (Hmm...)

The East Fortress Base Commander: “This way, please... Ahh. I apologise, I have forgotten my manners. Hey, bring something to drink.”

Warrior of the Fang: “Yes.”

Disciple Soldier: “Now, please be at ease. We are all military personnel, there are many formalities we would all be glad to dispense with.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “That would be a great relief. I am a brusque and impolite person, and I hope you will be able to pardon my words. I am the East Fortress Base Commander. Originally, I was one of the mercenaries involved in the Second Holy

Crusade, but after that, I served for a long time as one of the garrison fortress commanders in the City of the Gate. Thanks to some very strange vicissitudes of fate, I have somehow ended up in the Council of the City of the Gate, and I am presently the Khan of one of the Nine Great Tribes of the Demon World: the Tribe of the Gate. In this present war with the Demons of the Pale, I serve as the General of the Left.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “I am the Silver Tiger Lord. The Khan of one of the Nine Great Tribes, the Tribe of the Fang. I serve as the General of the Right.”

Lieutenant of Metal: (...This guy is really intimidating.)

Disciple Soldier: “I am the Minister for Defence in the Kingdom of Metal, the Disciple Soldier. I served as Deputy Commander in the Battle of the Plains of Scilla. With me, as stated, is the Iron Fist King. As the King of the Kingdom of Metal, he is the present leader of the Southern Alliance. Today, we represent the Southern Alliance in meeting you here.”

The Iron Fist King nods curtly.

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Firstly, we would like to express our gratitude for allowing us to use this venue. The Tribe of the Pale are a renegade faction of the Demon World which sought to assassinate the Demon King. We are grateful for the offer of passage to deal with them.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “We also sincerely apologise for having dragged the Human World into one of the Demon World’s power struggles, in other words, an internal affair.”

The Iron Fist King: “...”

Disciple Soldier: “Your Majesty, shouldn’t you say something to acknowledge this?”

Lieutenant of Metal: “Yes, I believe so.”

The Iron Fist King: “...”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “...”

The Iron Fist King: “...I hear the Tribe of the Fang also suffered immense casualties in this war?”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Indeed. Many of my warriors fell while fighting with the sudden reinforcements of human soldiers. However, they are brave warriors of the Fang. They fell with honour and valour.”

The Iron Fist King: “It must be shameful to have to fight in the Human World.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “There can be no excuse for defeat or shame. We do not fight with even a hint of shame. To fight with shame is to dishonour our values.”

The Iron Fist King: “...”

Disciple Soldier: (Don't pick a fight!)

The Silver Tiger Lord: "As we said earlier, the Demons of the Pale are traitors of the Demon World. They disgraced the Kurultai. To hunt them down, we have gone through many trials and challenges, we have nothing to be ashamed of."

The Iron Fist King: "...To chase a renegade faction all the way here, how futile."

The Silver Tiger Lord: "We are a Tribe of warriors. No matter where they go, to uphold our honour we are willing to chase them there."

The Iron Fist King: "We shall see."

The Silver Tiger Lord: "..."

The East Fortress Base Commander: (Uhh...)

Disciple Soldier: (That seems to have ended somehow.)

The Iron Fist King: "This forest is thick. These are virgin, unspoilt forests. Is it not inconvenient?"

The Silver Tiger Lord: "My people live in the mountain forests. The air here is fresh and the ground is good. We thank you for its provision."

Disciple Soldier: "What of food?"

The East Fortress Base Commander: "We brought much of it with us. We have also supplemented it with boars and deer we catch in the forest, though you may be assured we did not hunt many and we will not be staying long."

The Iron Fist King: "I shall arrange for food and wine to be sent."

The Silver Tiger Lord: "Thank you."

The Iron Fist King: "Then let us go."

The East Fortress Base Commander: "Oh, but you've only just come."

Disciple Soldier: "That's right. We can't waste such an opportunity! Surely we should talk more?"

The Iron Fist King: "We have both lost many comrades. There is much time and wine for us to spend with them. We, the Kingdom of Metal, are a military kingdom. The military has its military ceremonies."

The Silver Tiger Lord: "..."

The East Fortress Base Commander: "..."

Disciple Soldier: "I...see..."

The East Fortress Base Commander: "Thank you for your concern."

The Iron Fist King: “With regards to our inter-world diplomacy, that will be handled by the Queen of Ice and Snow and her diplomatic corps. I have no intention to become best friends with you Demons just yet, and that is a view shared by many of my people... However, I would be glad to share a glass of wine with you one day. That would be a fine time.”

The Silver Tiger Lord nods.

The East Fortress Base Commander: “...”

The Iron Fist King: “Let us go.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Warrior, raise your spear to send him off.”

Warrior of the Fang: “Yes, my Lord.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Let us go comfort the spirits of our warriors.”

—— The Demon World, the Banks of Phoenix Lake, Temporary Conference Venue

The Cyclops: “Today...firstly...”

The Baron of Steel: “Mmm.”

The Cyclops: “We have...managed to...make three...tunnels...”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “The design allows for the securing of five fist-lengths of leeway on the two sides.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Oh! That is a good thing.”

The Cyclops: “We the...Tribe of the Giants...paid a very...expensive...”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “As did the engineering crew of the Tribe of Banshees.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Hmm. On a related note, I also need to commission the paving of roads between the territory of my Tribe and the City of the Gate, and between the City of the Gate and the old territory of the Tribe of the Demons of the Pale.”

Aide-de-Camp: “I believe we can raise the capital required for this from loans as well as financial support from the Self-Governing Council of the City of the Gate.”

The Cyclops: “...Great.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “Mmm.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “We will rely on you then.”

The Baron of Steel: “We are also very grateful to you. It would be a great help to the administration of the old territory of the Demons of the Pale.”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “That’s right. How are the remaining Demons of the Pale?”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “Hmm.”

The Baron of Steel: “There are many problems, the first is logistical.”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “Hmm.”

The Baron of Steel: “We are especially concerned about the lack of clothing and food. The Army of the Pale seems to have taken these supplies in particular on their expedition.”

Aide-de-Camp: “If it’s about food, we can definitely send some of the necessities from the City, but unfortunately, it probably isn’t going to be enough.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “We have a productive advantage, so we can probably come up with quite a large amount of food. We’ll send some over. In return, we don’t mind taking payment in metals. We’ll require it for next year.”

The Baron of Steel: “I thank you.”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “And the other things?”

The Baron of Steel: “Logistically, we are not lacking in many other things. The Army of the Pale did not pillage anything on their way out, so the homes and facilities have not been destroyed. The ore mines are also completely intact, and we can quickly start to mine from them. However...”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “However?”

The Baron of Steel: “On a psychological level, we’ve got some massive problems. To begin with, the Demons of the Pale have a very strict, rigid, and stratified class system. The top of the hierarchy is dominated by the military. The remaining civilians and labourers form the lower hierarchies. With them being so used to such a society, it is incredibly challenging to direct...”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “Don’t tell me there’s violence?!”

The Baron of Steel: “No, there’s no violence, but it’s a very tense situation. It seems many of them are completely unable to accept that they have been ‘abandoned’ by their own people. There are also elderly labourers and civilians who have adopted an attitude of depression and resignation to the end.”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “What...”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “To think it got to that extent.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Mmm...”

The Cyclops: “How troublesome...”

The Baron of Steel: “The populace are used to being threatened with weapons in order to be coerced to follow orders and work hard and diligently, but we bear a sacred mission from the Demon King herself, and we the Tribe of the Automatons could not possibly adopt a similar course of action.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Mmm...”

The Baron of Steel: “With such a situation, we’ve got way too much on our hands to deal with.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “But these are not issues that we can resolve overnight.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Hmm.”

The Baron of Steel: “Do you have any good ideas?”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “...”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “I fear we must use a mixture of techniques.”

The Cyclops: “A...mixture...?”

The Baron of Steel: “What do you mean?”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “This rigid class system is the product of the hardening of ideologies. In other words, because they only consider their own fields and boundaries, their thoughts and ideologies are moulded by their society. It may decrease work productivity, but we could consider having them rotate their jobs. For example, letting the miners do some farmwork and letting the farmers do some of the mining, this will expand their understanding of the other elements of society and help break down any misunderstandings and intolerances.”

Aide-de-Camp: “I think that is a good idea. What do you think of this? At a specified date, we will buy over everything that they produce.”

The Cyclops: “That’s right...we also welcome...their involvement...in the road construction...”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “On a separate note, the Demon King did mention something about constructing a university when she took up the post. Since we’re doing something related, we might as well see that through as well.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “That sounds like something the Demon King would want.”

Aide-de-Camp: “How is the Demon King anyway? I hope that terrible Khan of ours hasn’t been troubling her too much.”

The Cyclops: “I wonder...”

The Fire Dragon Lord: "Ahem! About that, I have a report to make to this Committee. It's a report on the movements in the Surface World."

The Baron of Steel: "Let's hear it. It would be great to know how things are going with the Tribe of the Demons of the Pale while we deal with them down here."

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: "Mmm."

The Fire Dragon Lord: "Firstly, our primary objective of defeating the expedition of the Tribe of the Pale has succeeded."

Aide-de-Camp: "Very good!"

The Cyclops: "Good..."

The Fire Dragon Lord: "And during this war, as a result of fighting together with them, we have also reached a ceasefire agreement with one of the factions in the Surface World, the Southern Alliance."

Aide-de-Camp: "Southern Alliance..."

The Cyclops: "Who are...the Southern Alliance...?"

The Fire Dragon Lord: "Based on our reports, the continent we know of in the Surface World is formed from a loose messy group of 30 or so different countries."

Aide-de-Camp: "A country is similar to a Tribe in the Demon World. But your country is limited by where you were born and who you were born to. All of this land is controlled by one leader, a King... something like a Khan, but with more powers."

The Cyclops: "So it's like the Western Giants and the Northern Giants...Separate... but together..."

The Fire Dragon Lord: "The Southern Alliance is an alliance of seven of these countries formed in opposition to the group on the continent."

Aide-de-Camp: (The Tripartite Economic Union has progressed to that extent.)

The Baron of Steel: "And we have formed a ceasefire with them?"

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: "Hmm."

The Fire Dragon Lord: "However, the Central Continent and the Holy Church of Light seem to be planning their third conquest of the Demon World, we must be very careful of that..."

Aide-de-Camp: (As I thought, we still have much to fear of from the Human World.)

The Cyclops: "The Central Continent...The Holy Church of Light?"

Aide-de-Camp: "Those are the strongest organisations in the Surface World."

The Baron of Steel: “How strong are they?”

Aide-de-Camp: “They can field a massive army from the strengths of 20 countries. Until this Southern Alliance was set up, they were without parallel in strength. In some ways, they’re similar to the Kurultai. It was they that launched the Second...in other words, the attack of the City of the Gate by the Humans led by a force known as the Holy Crusaders. It’s a bit hard to explain without writing it down.”

Scribble scribble.

Aide-de-Camp: “Hmm... Mmm...”

Scribble.

Aide-de-Camp: “...”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “What are you writing?”

Aide-de-Camp: “Umm, this is a more detailed analysis of the battle with the numbers in. Firstly, the Holy Crusaders I talked about earlier. These are soldiers mustered from the Central Continent under the banner of the Holy Church, and have already been mobilised. They are currently in the Kingdom of White Night...”

The Baron of Steel: “The country that the Demons of the Pale invaded?”

Aide-de-Camp: “The very one. Having seized the kingdom from the Demons of the Pale, they seem to be working to make it their own territory.”

The Baron of Steel: “Is that something that happens often in the Human World?”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “Seizing other Tribes’ territories.”

Aide-de-Camp: “It is not a very common thing, but it’s definitely not unheard of. But the real issue is what effect this will have on their grand designs. The Kingdom of White Night is an important port along the great Polar Sea. Our Khan feels that the Crusaders may have engineered the fall of the Kingdom of White Night in order to seize that port. Their strength is roughly 20,000 strong, and is set to increase... It seems their objective is to throw their entire army behind an attack on the Demon World. Twenty thousand is many times more than the previous invasion force.”

The Cyclops: “...The Humans...are coming.”

The Baron of Steel: “So all this talk of ceasefire that the Demon King came up with was worthless.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “The Humans are still going to attack us after all, at least we have solved the issue with the Demons of the Pale.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Indeed. The Southern Alliance comprises of the following kingdoms that have entered a treaty with each other: the Kingdom of Winter, the Kingdom of Ice, the Kingdom of Metal, the Kingdom of the Lake, the Kingdom of Reeds, the Kingdom of

Branches, and the Kingdom of Red Horses. They may be just seven countries, but they hold vital resources and are powerful countries in their own rights. Had we not entered a ceasefire with them, we could be facing an enemy force upwards of 30,000 strong.”

The Cyclops: “...Is that so.”

The Baron of Steel: “Hmm.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “No, there’s even more. Had these seven Tribes not stood with us, not only would the attacking force increase, their army would be able to mobilise entirely without fear of attack from behind. Because of the ceasefire between the Southern Alliance and the Demons, these Holy Crusaders now have to be wary of any movements from the Southern Alliance while they attack us. With the Silver Tiger Lord and the Khan of the Gate, we have already managed to nullify and tie down 10,000 enemy soldiers.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Very true.”

Aide-de-Camp: (These Demons are very quick to recognise good work.)

The Cyclops: “But...even so...20,000...”

The Baron of Steel: “What would be the outcome of a war?”

Aide-de-Camp: “I do not know. I fear if it was easily settled, the Demon King would not still be out in the field.”

The Cyclops: “What should...we do...”

The Baron of Steel: “Hmm.”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “What do you think?”

Aide-de-Camp: “I am but a mere Aide-de-Camp, but... it seems that the Crusaders are bearing a new type of arm known as a musket. I will have to find time to explain it more clearly, but it is an extremely powerful weapon. The success of any battle seems to hinge on these weapons. We will need to strengthen our equipment, training, and command systems in the face of this. Furthermore, we must survey and judge possible battlegrounds and strengthen our signals and communications systems. Any larger decisions would probably have to wait for the Demon King’s return.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “Survey and judge possible battlegrounds?”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “It should be somewhere near the Portal. Most of it is wasteland... but it’s on the borders of the Tribe of Dragons, the City of the Gate, the Tribe of the Fiends, and the old territory of the Tribe of the Demons of the Pale.”

The Cyclops: “...Surveillance.”

The Baron of Steel: “Indeed, we must work to improve our surveillance networks.”

The Chieftain of the Tattooed: “While the Queen of Fairies is still on the Surface World, the Fairies will continue to keep up their surveillance. The Tribe of the Fiends will assist in communications.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “In that case, let us divide up the workload.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Hmm, we will soon know if our efforts are to bear fruit.”

———— **The Cliffs near the Plains of Scilla**

Resourceful Young Man: “Hey, hey, coming through!”

Disciple Nobleman: “Hoho, splendid.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Delicious.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Hehe!”

Disciple Nobleman: “Alright, open the chains. You’ve redeemed yourself.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Hahaha.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Heh! I’ve shown you, haven’t I?”

Disciple Nobleman: “We’ve been protecting you all this while, though.”

Mercenary Survivor: “It’s great, isn’t it. He’s bought you warm clothes and given you good food to eat.”

Resourceful Young Man: “It’s an appropriate reward!”

Disciple Nobleman: “That’s right, a reward. You don’t have to give it back.”

Resourceful Young Man: “I’ll hold you to that.”

Disciple Nobleman: “But I’ve given you the opportunity to do something good for your home, to turn from the path of indolence to do something righteous, I think you should be grateful for that.”

Resourceful Young Man: “I... am.”

Disciple Nobleman: “Very good, but it’s about to become troublesome.”

Resourceful Young Man: “What?!”

Disciple Nobleman: “No, no, that is my problem.”

Mercenary Survivor: “How will we do now without our Leader?”

Disciple Nobleman: “I placed my utmost trust and confidence in your Leader to carry out his duties no matter the cost. I will be sure to uphold our contract.”

Mercenary Survivor: "Thank you very much."

Resourceful Young Man: "Will we really be fine in such a place?"

Disciple Nobleman: "Yeah, in contrast, if we tried to carry this all the way back to the Kingdom right now, we would definitely be discovered. The enemy has surveillance in this area. But they're not fools, and besides... it's a very heavy load."

Mercenary Survivor: "That's right, it's clunky."

Resourceful Young Man: "That being said, what is it?"

Disciple Nobleman: "Saltpetre."

Mercenary Survivor: "...It's a treasure, even though it may look dirty."

Resourceful Young Man: "Isn't it just a useless rock?"

Disciple Nobleman: "If only it really was just a useless rock."

----- **The Winter Palace, the Grand Hall, the Strategy Room**

The Lone Winter King: "Hmm... In that case..."

The Queen of Fairies: "Yes, preparations are complete."

Fairy Maiden flits around.

Butler: "Very good."

The Lone Winter King: "Hmm, for the moment, I will take the first step by putting my seal on this treaty of ceasefire and peace."

Disciple Merchant: "We will have to work a bit more on the content. The first is that a distance of twenty miles around the Portal shall be designated as a demilitarised no-man's land. The second is the exchange of all prisoners captured during the first two Holy Crusades and the battles for the Isle of Light. Furthermore, it is forbidden to pursue judgment for the beginning of the war on both sides. A *Consulate** shall be established in the City of Winter and the City of the Gate, so that communication and exchange can be better facilitated... That's it, I think."

The Lone Winter King: "We can continue to amend the clauses, but once I place my seal on this, it will be binding throughout the Southern Alliance. I can obtain the guarantees and support from the other Kingdoms of the Alliance, but I cannot do anything about the Central Continent. I hope you understand..."

The Queen of Fairies: "Yes, I understand. I will take the document and discuss it with the other Khans of the Kurultai to reach their signed agreement."

The Lone Winter King: “On my side, I will ensure the signatures and seals of all the Kingdoms of the Southern Alliance. Once we have finished working out the details of the content, all that is left is just a formal ceremony.”

The Queen of Fairies: “This is a very great step for our worlds.”

Fairy Maiden nods.

Disciple Merchant: “I hope it leads to greater things.”

Butler: “That being said, how about the matter of the coalition army in the Kingdom of Metal?”

Explanation

Consulate: A consul is a type of diplomat. Compared to an ambassador, a consul is of a lower rank. Embassies are diplomats who represent the country to make agreements and enact foreign policies, but consuls are diplomats whose duties are to perform diplomatic services for the good of people in the countries. However, in some countries where ambassadors are not exchanged, consuls also have to enact foreign policy. For countries with chilled foreign policy, exchanging ambassadors may be an act of friendship and goodwill which is too hasty at the present moment; hence it may be more prudent to establish a consulate and build upon that for the embassy at a later time.

The Queen of Fairies: “As the Tribe of the Demons of the Pale has collapsed, we should be heading back to the Demon World, but how do you feel about a joint coalition?”

The Lone Winter King: “I have no objection to that.”

The Queen of Fairies: “In that case, I shall have to seek approval for this.”

Fairy Maiden: “Yes.”

Disciple Merchant: “Right, we’ve got a lot to do.”

Attendant: “Yes.”

Butler: “There really is a lot of work that needs to be done.”

The Lone Winter King: “This seems strange to us as well, but the Central Continent seems to have declared the Kingdom of White Night their *direct demesne** after assuming control of the country.”

The Queen of Fairies: “Direct demesne...”

The Lone Winter King: “Basically, the Church owns the Kingdom directly. More importantly, the Central Continent now has a strong foothold in the area. Our reports

indicate that the aim of their invasion of the Demon World is to procure something known as the Holy Relic.”

The Queen of Fairies: “Our reports indicate so as well, but we do not know anything of this Holy Relic. We have consulted the Kurultai and various scholars, but even up till now, we know nothing of it.”

Fairy Maiden flits wings.

Disciple Merchant: “Hmm.”

The Lone Winter King: “It could be a fake.”

Disciple Merchant: “Indeed...”

The Queen of Fairies: “What do you mean?”

The Lone Winter King: “Very simply, I believe this is purely an annexation of territory for the Central Continent. It’s a lush territory with infinite possibilities. They’re probably using this pretence as an excuse to invade.”

The Queen of Fairies: “That is a terrible possibility.”

Butler: “But, at the same time, the invasion of the City of the Gate is set as well. Of course, they will need to pass through the Gate, or rather the Portal, and having passed through, their logistical networks would have to be funnelled through that small opening, hence they couldn’t possibly think about advancing on the Demon King’s Castle. I have no idea about their intentions.”

The Queen of Fairies: “Yeah, they could be attempting to invade the territories of the Tribe of Dragons, the Tribe of the Demons of the Pale, or the Tribe of Fiends. — But last time, our Tribes did not trust each other, and there was a problem with coordination and cooperation. Even the City was under the protection of the Dragons. With all the different Tribes residing there, its defence was a serious issue.”

Butler: “But it’s different now?”

The Queen of Fairies: “Yes. With the end of the Kurultai, I wouldn’t say the Demon Tribes have unified, but it’s definitely not what it was like before.”

The Lone Winter King: (But the Demon World doesn’t yet understand what those muskets are, right? If there really are 10,000 soldiers equipped with those things, then the Demon World’s defences will simply crumble like paper...)

The Queen of Fairies: “We Fairies do not have large-sized bodies, neither do we have magical abilities suited for combat purposes. That is why we hope to avoid war at all costs.”

Disciple Merchant: “Indeed, our priority is to prevent conflict.”

The Lone Winter King: (That seems difficult... With all the countries and noblemen pulled into this, it would be ridiculous to think they would all just go home.)

Butler coughs.

The Lone Winter King: “Yeah, that’s what we hope for as well. However, at the same time, we must prepare for the event that peace is not achievable. Please convey my best wishes to the Khans of the Kurultai and the Demon King who rules the Demon World.”

——— **The City of the Gate, an Inn Under Renovation**

Bells jingle.

The Hero: “Heyyyyy.”

The Demon King: “Oi, is this really alright?”

The Hero: “It’s fine, it’s a very light-hearted shop.”

Horned Barmaid: “Welcome!”

The Demon King raises an eyebrow.

Innkeeper: “Ohh, if it isn’t the Black Knight. Please, please, come in!”

The Hero: “Oh? What’s with that expression?”

Horned Barmaid: “What will you drink?”

The Demon King: “Ah.”

The Hero: “Two flagons of cold ale, please.”

Totters away.

The Demon King: “I haven’t decided yet.”

The Hero: “It’s customary to begin with a cold flagon of ale.”

The Demon King: “Really... This is my first time being in this sort of establishment.”

The Hero: “Is that so?”

The Demon King: “I’ve never needed to.”

Horned Barmaid: “Sorry for the wait!”

The Demon King: “Th-thank you.”

The Hero: “Let’s drink! Today we’ll drink a lot!”

The Demon King: “Yeah. Don’t you need to pay, though?”

The Hero: “We’ll pay all at once later... You really don’t know all these common sense things.”

The Demon King: “I’m sorry.”

The Hero: “Don’t apologise. Let’s fill up on some good food.”

The Demon King: “Yeah.”

The Hero: “Bottoms up!”

The Demon King: “Bottoms up!”

Glug glug glug.

Fiend Merchant: “Hey! Get some wine over here! A bottle!”

Demon Merchant: “And two sticks of roast lamb too!”

The Hero: “What should we eat?”

The Demon King: “Which one is most delicious?”

The Hero: “Excuse me, what do you have?”

Innkeeper: “I’ve got just about everything, but we’ve got some new bread here. I’ve got potatoes, and the lamb is juicy. I’ve got some fresh bread, which I can make with cabbage, bacon, and sausages. The sausages are those really popular black pepper and soft bones kind.”

The Hero: “Then we’ll have some of that. And cheese. Hmm, and maybe some salt sprinkled soft lamb rack with steamed vegetables. And apples.”

Innkeeper: “Got it! And the order of serving?”

The Hero: “I’ll leave it to you.”

The Demon King: “Wh-what? Why are you so used to such things?”

The Hero: “I’m the Hero. I’ve spent a lot of time travelling from places to places.”

Rowdy songs.

The Demon King: “Is that so... It’s very crowded here.”

The Hero: “Yeah, this store is fairly popular. It’s an old store from before the Human Invasion of the City of the Gate, it sells great food and affordable prices.”

Innkeeper: “My, my, thank you for the recommendation. I’ll serve the cheese first, then the sausages. I’ll make sure to bring lots.”

The Demon King: “Thank you?”

The Hero: “What are you so flustered about?”

Innkeeper: “Hahaha! I see now! The lady isn’t used to such low-class establishments as ours. You rascal! Hahahahaha! This isn’t the kind of place you choose for a date!”

The Hero: “Come now, you shouldn’t belittle your own establishment, old man.”

Innkeeper: “Oh please, it’s fine that we’re a low-class establishment. We’re the kind of place you’re drawn to by the smell of great food, the scent of great wine, and the promise of great company.”

The Demon King: “...Mmm. It’s delicious.”

The Hero: “How has it been recently?”

Innkeeper: “Ahh, it’s been great. How do I put it? It’s really gotten bigger. Since they expanded the roads in the area, I’ve also expanded my store by a bit. There’s a moneylending service now, and the price of food items have gotten steadily cheaper as of late. There are more people around here too, and my profits just go up every day.”

The Hero: “Really? That’s good to hear.”

Innkeeper: “Well, it’s all thanks to your efforts, right?”

The Hero: “Come now.”

Horned Barmaid: “Refill?”

Innkeeper: “Ah, right. What will it be next?”

The Demon King: “Hmm, umm...”

Horned Barmaid: “How about wine?”

The Demon King: “Let’s have that then.”

The Hero: “Bring two.”

Horned Barmaid: “Coming right up!”

Innkeeper: “Well, take it easy then! I’ll bring the lamb soon.”

Rowdy jostling.

Fiend Merchant: “How’s the salt trade going?”

Demon Merchant: “I’m profiting, but the price is stabilising, so it’s not as profitable as it used to be.”

Tattooed Storekeeper: “My, my, how troublesome, hahahaha.”

Travelling Mercenary: “I suppose that’s how it is!”

Rowdy jostling.

The Demon King: “—”

The Hero: “How is it? Nice?”

The Demon King: “Eh, ah.”

The Hero: “?”

The Demon King: “Yeah.”

The Hero: “Don’t tell me it was bad?”

The Demon King: “Not at all, these sausages are delicious.”

The Hero: “Then, you’re not good with stores like this? I’m sorry.”

The Demon King: “No, that’s not it. It’s just. It’s my first time being in such a happy and rowdy place. I didn’t think of it that way at first, but I clearly don’t know enough about the world.”

The Hero: “I see.”

Fang Hunter: “Pelts are selling well this year. I’m going to need a present to take back.”

Human Merchant: “How about some *Jasper**? If you give it to a girl you’re interested in, you’ll definitely advance your relationship. Otherwise how about a metal pot? You can bring it with you everywhere, it’s very convenient.”

Rowdy cheers.

The Demon King: “—”

The Hero: “?”

The Demon King: “What are they talking about?”

The Hero: “A whole bunch of things. That Fang boy is here to sell the pelts he got from the forest. He’s at a good age, so it’s about time for him to do these things independently. His sword and scabbard look quite new, so I suppose he’s just started. He probably came to the city to sell those pelts on his own? He probably sold them at a good price. I’m not exactly clear on how it works, but it seems like the profits he brings home are a mark of his adulthood. He’ll probably use them as a dowry for his marriage.”

The Demon King: “I see... I’m very familiar with the politics, economic breakdown, and demographics of the Tribe of the Fang. But I should really try to understand their culture too. That’s why even though it’s been explained to me and I know that business is often transacted in informal settings like this, it’s my first time seeing it.”

The Hero: “Yeah.”

Horned Barmaid: “Steamed vegetables!”

The Demon King: “It’s warm.”

Horned Barmaid: "It's most delicious when it's warm! Please enjoy!" *Smiles.*

The Hero: "Thanks!"

Horned Barmaid: "No, no."

The Demon King: "... " *Chew, chew.*

The Hero: "Delicious!"

The Demon King: "Yeah."

The Hero: "?"

The Demon King: "No, it's delicious..."

The Hero: "..."

Rowdy cheering.

Water Dragon Lady: "Ahahahaha, how beautiful."

Travelling Bard: "No, no, it's just some of my feelings."

Explanation

Jasper: A semi-precious, opaque stone. Semi-precious stones are expensive, but not to the extent of other stones like diamonds or rubies. Jaspers come in many varieties and colours, such as green, yellow and red.

The Demon King: "Everyone seems to be having fun."

The Hero: "Yeah."

The Demon King: "Everyone's faces are flushed red, and they're all laughing."

The Hero: "This is what an inn is like."

The Demon King: "Really, but?"

The Hero raises eyebrow.

The Demon King: "It's just, so amazing... I can feel a floating feeling in my chest."

The Hero chews.

Innkeeper: "Here it is! Freshly roasted lamb with salt, herbs and spring onions. — What is it?"

The Demon King: "Your food is really delicious."

The Hero: “?”

Innkeeper: “Well, well, it’s always great to receive compliments from such a beautiful lady. Thanks for the flattery!”

The Demon King: “No, I meant no pretence.”

The Hero: “...That’s right. It’s much, much better than having boiled potatoes. I’m really grateful.”

Innkeeper: “I’ll take your word then. Bring some wine! Make sure you take care of these two! This is the Demon King’s right hand man, the Black Knight! Don’t think he’s just any rascal!”

The Hero: “Stop it!!!”

Innkeeper: “Our establishment is proud to have you as a regular customer. In fact, our store was used as a base for the Liberation War!”

The Demon King: “Is that so?”

The Hero: “In a way.”

Fang Hunter: “The Black Knight is here?!”

Human Merchant: “Really! I never thought I’d see him here!”

Demon Merchant: “Is the Demon King alright? I heard that she fell during the Kurultai.”

Tattooed Shopkeeper: “It’s really thanks to her that we were able to keep up our business! We’re all grateful to the Demon King!”

The Demon King: “Ah...”

The Hero: “...”

Horned Barmaid: “Eh? Eh?!”

Innkeeper: “Hoho!”

The Hero: “Ah! Alright, listen up! It’s true that I’m the subordinate of the Demon King, the Sword of the Demon World, the Black Knight! Do not be worried. It’s true that the Demon King had taken an arrow from some troublemakers, but the wound is mostly healed and today she is working to bring the Demon World to the path of peace and prosperity! Look at the City of the Gate, the personal demesne of the Demon King! This is a place where Humans and Demons can share a glass together, where we can restore relationships even after a fight. Where we can buy and sell whatever we want! Hey! Old man!”

Innkeeper: “Here!”

The Hero: “Make sure everyone gets what they want. The first glass is on me! Alright, raise your glasses everyone! To the Demon King! She may be weak at fighting, but she’s serious about defending the people! Let’s drain this glass in the name of the Demon King!”

Horned Barmaid: “Yeah!”

Horned Barmaid: “Have some here too.”

Fang Hunter: “For the Demon King!”

Human Merchant: “Long live the Demon King!”

“Long live the Demon King! Peace throughout the land!”

——— The City of the Gate, the Headquarters of the Union

Shrewd Accountant: “Hmm.”

Union Employee: “What is it?”

Shrewd Accountant: “We’re 10% closer to our goal compared to last month. What an anomaly.”

Union Employee: “We’ll soon require manpower then.”

Shrewd Accountant: “Damn... And how is the city?”

Union Employee: “It’s very vibrant... Well, that’s not exactly a very surprising thing. It’s really always been this way. Oh, that’s right. A large caravan arrived from the Automaton today.”

Shrewd Accountants: “Those must be things like springs and bolts. Human blacksmiths can’t match the quality Automaton are able to create.”

Door opens.

Union Employee: “My lady.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Employee. Thank you for your hard work.”

Union Employee: “Have you finished the letter?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “I just need to add some personal things.”

Shrewd Accountant: “It sure would be great if we could use Teleportation Magic as and when we like it. It’s a once-a-week thing, but transporting these small things is really important for trade.”

Union Employee: “That being said, communications is really a challenge.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “And that’s why we have to act with some degree of independence.”

Shrewd Accountant: “No letters from the Councillor?”

Union Employee: “Nope.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “We don’t have a private letter-writing relationship, so it is to be expected.”

Shrewd Accountant: “Is that so?”

Union Employee: “And this is?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “That is for one of my correspondences.”

Shrewd Accountant: “Correspondences?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Yes, a man who has set my heart on fire like a crystal rose. A truly gorgeous man.”

Shrewd Accountant: “Umm.”

Union Employee: “I suppose it’s a secret?”

Shrewd Accountant: “You’d best erase it from your memory.”

Union Employee: “Understood.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Hmmm.”

Hello! Fire Dragon Lady. How is your work? The Kingdom of Winter is about to welcome the best season of the year. It’s summer, so the potato crops will have been harvested and brought to the palace. Every day is a real banquet.

This year, the tulips are in full bloom. The pigs have a lot to eat and are getting plump and happy. In this time, there was a painful battle in the Kingdom of Metal. The Merchant seems to be extremely worried every day. It is my job to manage the daily accounts and ledgers. Recently, I’ve become able to perform six figure sums mentally too. I seem to be getting faster because I do it every day. It’s still a secret from my teacher though.

I suppose you’ll come again to the Kingdom of Winter? The honey sweets they make at this time of the year are exceptionally delicious.

Fire Dragon Lady: “Hehe.”

*Umm, that’s right. In this time, the issue with the cheese is exactly as you said it would be. Having researched extensively, we went ahead with the securities plan. Securities are real dandelions.**

TL Explanation

Security/Dandelion: Security is *tanpo*. Dandelion is *tanpopo*. It's a bad joke.

I've really matured, can you tell? The plan that we developed together was praised by my teacher. But it seems my teacher has other plans for me and new assignments too.

Fire Dragon Lady: "Heehee."

I've also begun to wear long boots. They're soft and made out of really nice leather. Normal people usually only have two pairs of shoes. Long boots and short shoes worn in the summer. Of course, noble people have a lot more shoes than that.

In the winter, shoes lined with felt or fur are better to keep the snow and the cold out. Shoes are a very important thing, so they're always placed under the bed when we go to sleep. Every village always has a craftsman specialising in making and fixing shoes.

My teacher doesn't seem to care about things like shoes. Maybe it's because we're so short-staffed and he has other things to worry about. I wonder where soldiers get their shoes, they seem to be able to walk forever without getting tired. If you know, do you think you could tell me?

I'll write to you again. I hope we can eat some sweets together soon.

Shrewd Accountant: "...You look happy."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Quite. I can see a lot of work has been put into this."

Union Employee: "I don't understand."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Don't you know that this is part of being a merchant too?"

Shrewd Accountant: "Cultivating relationships?"

Fire Dragon Lady: "Relationships can change the business, can't they?"

Shrewd Accountant: "Hahaha, you've really taken that very seriously."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Do you know where there's a shoemaker in the city?"

Shrewd Accountant: "I could help you check."

Fire Dragon Lady: "I hear that the Fang Hunters have had a good pelt harvest this year."

Shrewd Accountant: "That's right. Deer, boars, even ice snakes. The season is good and there haven't been any wars."

Union Employee: "It must be a good time."

Fire Dragon Lady: “And will they make military boots?”

Shrewd Accountant: “What an interesting question.”

Union Employee: “That being said, shoes are made very well in the Demon World.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “I think the *Human shoes** are pretty strange. They don’t seem to have very solid soles.”

Shrewd Accountant: “But that’s considered normal back over there.”

Union Employee: “Perhaps we could start a trade in shoes.”

Explanation

Human Shoes: In the early Middle Ages, shoes were made with the turnshoe method of construction, using one piece of leather to form a leather sock before turning it inside out to wear. In the Middle Ages, the turnshoe method was improved and the sole was separated from the shoe itself. The sole was then strengthened, and hence this required at least two separate pieces of leather. However, the method of shoe making, using a welt to connect the shoe and the soles, is a more recent invention in the 16th century. This is a complex procedure, and hence necessitated the need for professional shoemiths.

——— **The Outskirts of the City of the Gate, on a Hill**

Grass blowing in the wind.

The Demon King: “...”

The Hero: “...”

The Demon King: “...”

The Hero: “Shall we?”

The Demon King: “...Yeah.”

The Hero: “Are you alright? We can go right away.”

The Demon King: “No.”

The Hero: “?”

The Demon King: “If we go now, it’ll end.”

The Hero: “Umm.”

The Demon King: “My dignified image as the Demon King, and my relationship with you will end.”

The Hero: “Not again.”

The Demon King: “Anyway, not right now.”

The Hero: “Got it. Should we go down?”

The Demon King: “Yeah.”

The Hero: “...Are you alright?”

The Demon King: “I feel unexpectedly uneasy.”

The Hero: “Ahh.”

The Demon King: “Water.”

The Hero: “I just gave you some, but here.”

Gulp gulp.

The Hero: “How do you feel?”

The Demon King: “My head is throbbing.”

The Hero: “You clearly drank too much.”

The Demon King: “What’s the point of being the Demon King? Despite all my efforts, the world has gone to war three times. What is up with the world?”

The Hero: “What are you saying?”

The Demon King: “I raise my head and I see deflation, I lower my head and I see inflation.”

The Hero: “I have no idea what you’re talking about, but I can tell you’re not in a good state.”

The Demon King: “If you don’t hold on to me, I’ll fall off the world.”

The Hero: “I’m holding on to you tightly.”

The Demon King: “Save me, Hero.”

The Hero: “I’m holding on to you while you’re drunk, you should be thankful.”

The Demon King: “Not at all.” *Slumps.*

The Hero: “Hey, you’ll get wet on the dew.”

The Demon King: “That’s okay, it feels nice too.”

The Hero sighs.

The Demon King: "The Chief Maid isn't around so she won't get angry."

The Hero: "That's not really the point."

The Demon King: "Hero, Hero!"

The Hero: "?"

The Demon King: "Hehehe, I love it when you hold me."

The Hero: "Are you a kid?"

The Demon King: "I'm just really happy."

The Hero: "You're not a kid, you're just drunk."

The Demon King: "But it was delicious."

The Hero: "It was."

The Demon King: "And you told me to bottoms up."

The Hero: "I suppose I did."

The Demon King: "..."

The Hero: "..."

The Demon King: "Hahahahaha!"

The Hero: "That was sudden!"

The Demon King: "It feels great to be invincible!"

The Hero: "Something strange seems to have triggered."

The Demon King: "Yeah, I'm all relaxed and I can go anywhere now."

The Hero: "That's good."

The Demon King: "Now I just need to feel something fluffy and it'll be perfect."

The Hero: "Not with this again."

The Demon King: "Stingy."

The Hero: "You'll wet it."

The Demon King: "You're a stingy, stingy Hero."

The Hero: "You're a drunk, drunk Demon King."

The Demon King: "Look there, Hero."

The Hero: "You're not going to trick me with that. How many times do you think the old man has done that to me."

The Demon King: "Come on."

The Hero: "What is it?"

The Demon King: "The rainbow is dipping."

The Hero: "Ahh..."

The Demon King: "Isn't it pretty?"

The Hero: "Yeah."

Grass sways in the wind.

The Demon King: "..."

The Hero: "...What a nice wind."

Grass sways in the wind.

The Demon King: "We can't lose."

The Hero: "Yeah."

The Demon King: "I'll make sure to remedy all my plans. It was my mistake that the enemy managed to get their hands on those muskets. I was originally intending to take responsibility by offering an even stronger weapon to the Southern Alliance... But, if I were to do that, more people would just die."

The Hero: "Yeah."

The Demon King: "But while I was hesitating... about whether or not the widespread use of gunpowder was a good or a bad thing, the enemy has produced countless numbers of muskets."

The Hero: "...Yeah."

The Demon King: "But after receiving that lecture from you, I've woken up. I can't continue this way."

The Hero: "..."

Grass sways in the wind...

The Demon King: "I know now. I can't do anything on my own. I should have discussed these things earlier. If I had entrusted it to her, she would have found a way to reduce the bloodshed."

The Hero: "Yeah."

The Demon King: “I have to stop running away from this thing. I should have spoken to the Female Paladin from the start. Had I talked to her about the muskets earlier, a lot less people would have had to die.”

The Hero: “I see.”

The Demon King: “Well, when we get back, I’ll sort it all out... So we can see what’s on the other side of the hill. You’ve got a lot of work to do as well.”

The Hero: “Leave it to me.”

Chapter 2, “What the Human World Hates Most is a Cowardly Hero.”

——— **The Portal, the Construction Site, One of the Bridges**

Boom! Boom!

Middle Aged Merchant: “Any time now!”

Disciple Engineer: “Ohh. Middle Aged Merchant! It’s done! It’s finally finished!!”

Middle Aged Merchant: “I dropped by at the dormitories just a moment ago.”

Disciple Engineer: “Really? And is everybody happy there?”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Yes, everybody is over the moon. And tonight will be a banquet, I may assume?”

Disciple Engineer: “Yes, we’ve got to celebrate after all!”

Boom! Boom!

Middle Aged Merchant: “Finally.”

Disciple Engineer: “Yes. A lot of incidents occurred, but we’ve managed to make one more bridge than we originally expected, and the safety is assured.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “I’ve already received some reports from fellow merchants who have passed these bridges. Everyone is very grateful. Because of these bridges and the lifts to change the elevation, goods can be shipped across easily. What fantastic work.”

Disciple Engineer: “No, no! I was glad to be of service. I only did what I could as a craftsman.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “No... These bridges mean a lot. They’ll probably go down in history from now on. They may change in form over time, but I know this for sure... Thank you! Disciple Engineer.”

Disciple Engineer: “...No, umm, hahaha! When you put it that way, I really have no way to reply!”

Middle Aged Merchant: “In that case, I’ll be relying on you for the next eight years of stone bridges.”

Disciple Engineer: “—So, you procured the funding?”

Middle Aged Merchant: “No, but leave it to me. If it comes to, I have my ways. I know some people...”

Disciple Engineer: “Shall we discuss something else?”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Yes.” *Smiles.*

Boom! Boom!

Disciple Engineer: “Don’t tell me, that’s... a fort?”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Why do you think that way?”

Disciple Engineer: “Actually, it was the first thing I thought of when I saw the temples around the City of the Gate.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “That’s—”

Disciple Engineer: “This city used to be a great battleground. It’s an ancient city with a heart of steel. If anything were to happen, these defences can be deployed to ensure the protection of the people for years.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Is that so?”

Disciple Engineer: “...”

Middle Aged Merchant: “I see. Then perhaps I should take a look around?”

Disciple Engineer: “So you have thought of it?”

Middle Aged Merchant: “We may be in the middle of a ceasefire, but I do not know what will happen. It seems that the City will prosper best if we can maintain its security. That would allow us merchants to travel safely without fear.”

Disciple Engineer: “Indeed...”

Boom! Boom!

Fiend Labourer: “Let’s eat well later!”

Labourer: “Let’s have a mutton hotpot tonight!”

Giant Craftsman: “I’ll look...forward to...that!”

Middle Aged Merchant: “...”

Disciple Engineer: “Oh right. Now that the work is complete, it’s definitely time to pay their salary.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Yes. Indeed—Well then! Shall we go? To the City of the Gate?”

Disciple Engineer: “Sure. Let’s paint the town red tonight, tomorrow as well.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “According to the reports we’ve received, it seems that the likelihood of the City of the Gate becoming a battleground is not low.”

Disciple Engineer nods.

Middle Aged Merchant: “Could I count on you for one more thing? This time it doesn’t come from the Union. In other words, it’s not an official request from the City of the Gate. Rather, it’s a request from me personally, and all the people of the City of the Gate who hope for its independence. I sincerely apologise, but you probably won’t be paid sufficiently for it as well.”

Disciple Engineer: “Sure, I’ll do it.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Really? — Without hesitation?”

Disciple Engineer: “Yeah. No matter what, there’s a girl whose return I am waiting for. My greatest hope is to welcome everyone who comes back to this bridge.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Is that so...”

Disciple Engineer: “So, I suppose you want me to build fortifications. Let me show you the skills I have been bestowed upon by my teacher, is that acceptable?”

——— **The Village of Wintering, the Headquarters of the Holy Order of the Lake, the Private Quarters of the Grandmaster**

The Female Paladin: “Hmm...”

The Demon King: “I’ve been enlightened. War is unavoidable.”

The Chief Maid: “You’ve become a very splendid person.” *Smiles.*

The Female Paladin: “So, what do you intend to do?”

The Demon King: “I have absolutely no idea.”

The Female Paladin: “...Hey, hey.”

The Demon King: “No, you’ll find that the members of my Tribe are very removed from subject matters outside of our specific areas of expertise. I’m an economist, so I’m very familiar with technological advancements and sociology, but other areas of expertise are out of my reach. Especially the field of military studies.”

The Female Paladin: “Really... I thought you would have been an expert of such things since you’re the Demon King.”

The Demon King: “I’m not that great.”

The Female Paladin: “But wasn’t the musket given to the Kingdom of Metal as blueprints for production by their craftsmen your idea?”

The Demon King: “Yes, I did not expect the blueprints to be leaked and transferred to the Central Continent. Not without my capture, at least. What’s scary is that one of these craftsmen was willing to pass the technology straight on to the Holy Church.”

The Chief Maid: "...Yeah."

The Female Paladin: "This?" *Chunk.*

The Chief Maid: "Oh, you got your hands on it?"

The Female Paladin: "We found quite a few when we searched the battlefield. But I suppose I still don't understand. Would you care to explain?"

Click click.

The Demon King: "Hmm, it's lighter than I expected. This must be a matter of engineering... To explain it, well... basically, this musket is a metal tube. Inside the tube, there is a round metal bullet and some gunpowder."

The Female Paladin: "Gunpowder, isn't that an ancient lost technology?"

The Demon King: "That's right. It's black powder. This gunpowder is basically a substance capable of rapid combustion when ignited. By closing one end of the tube, the explosive force can be concentrated to propel the bullet at high speeds from the open end of the tube. In essence, that's basically how the mechanism works."

The Female Paladin: "It sounds like a very simple weapon."

The Demon King: "It's simple in a way, but wouldn't you say it's more complex than just swinging a sword or a spear around?"

The Female Paladin: "That's true... Then, how do you feel about the performance of the weapon?"

The Demon King: "I don't actually have any experience using it, so I don't know. But even though the basic mechanism which I talked about earlier is simple, the craftsmanship and precision of engineering can greatly affect its performance."

The Female Paladin: "...Really?"

The Demon King: "However, as I'm sure you have noticed, it can fire up to a range of about 100 steps, and its penetrating power is insufficient to pierce through plate armour from a distance."

The Female Paladin: "It's still impressive, better than crossbows at any rate."

The Demon King: "That's right. The firing interval ranges from one shot in 5 minutes to one shot per minute depending on the skill of the firer. Its accuracy is also dependent on the skill of the firer."

The Female Paladin: "Mmhmm."

The Demon King: "That being said, the bullet being ejected from the tube flies in an almost completely straight line and, due to its size and speed, is much less affected by wind than arrows. Used by amateurs, it has a much higher accuracy as well."

The Female Paladin: “...”

The Demon King: “I’m sure you have a vague idea of this as well, but the power of the bow and the flight speed of the arrows are largely decided by the size of the bow and the strength of material. In other words, elasticity is directly proportional to force generated. A crossbow has the same construction, except it uses cranks and gears to replace the sheer pulling force of the arm. In contrast, the musket’s force is directly proportional to the explosive force of the gunpowder. A stronger person using a musket would not make the force generated any stronger, but on the other hand, a weaker person using a musket would not make the force generated any weaker either. Even a weak, thin, young man has the power to penetrate a full suit of plate armour in his hands.”

The Female Paladin: “I sort of understand.”

The Demon King: “Mmm.”

The Female Paladin: “The weapon itself is not the problem.”

The Demon King: “Really?”

The Female Paladin: “It’s a troublesome weapon, but in the end, it’s just a weapon. With appropriate strategy, victory is possible. It can fire up to one hundred paces, but it’s not reliable at that range. At anything more than 50 paces, it can’t stop an armoured enemy. Moreover, its accuracy is inconsistent. If for instance, you wanted to aim at the Commander, you would be better off finding an experienced archer.”

The Demon King: “Is that so?”

The Female Paladin: “But this is in a situation of equal numbers. The reason why these weapons are troublesome... No, rather, the reason why the Holy Crusaders are so troublesome is the method in which they employ these weapons. — In other words, it’s the fact that they are all willing to borrow the invention of their ‘human comrades’. Were ten peasant musketeers to face ten knights on the battlefield, it is likely the ten knights would win easily. However, if we changed that to thirty peasant musketeers, the situation is now different. It’s a weapon which is capable of overturning the power held by cavalry and heavy infantry.”

The Demon King: “...”

The Chief Maid: “...”

The Female Paladin: “Also, the really efficient way of using these weapons is for a pitched battle on an open plain, with infantry firing in a closely compacted formation.”

The Demon King: “Hmm.”

The Female Paladin: “...Then.”

The Demon King: “What?”

The Female Paladin: “What do you think the weakness of this weapon is?”

The Demon King: “Well. Simply put, this is a firearm. It needs a fuse to be lit for it to engage, so it’s not a very reliable weapon. In other words, there may be misfires. Moreover, you also lose the freedom of position. If it’s fired in a level manner, it still functions, but when the aim is adjusted upwards or downwards, the efficiency is reduced. And because it needs to be lit, humidity has to be low. Its greatest enemy would be rain. There’s also the issue of the difficulty of lighting the fuse in a compact formation.”

The Female Paladin: “...And is there a way to remedy these issues?”

The Demon King: “Hmm. What you’re talking about is a flintlock, which is basically the next stage of evolution. By using a struck flint to produce sparks to light the gunpowder, many of the disadvantages can be overturned. The compactness of the formation can also be improved.”

The Female Paladin: “No. What are the chances those will be leaked as well?”

The Demon King: “I can’t deny it. But there’s also the issue of production. If they succeed in the production of the new design, they would still be laden with massive stocks of the old design.”

The Female Paladin: “That’s true...”

The Demon King: “Supplies is another issue. Without gunpowder, it’s just a useless tube. Unlike arrows, gunpowder isn’t something you can make in the field.”

The Female Paladin: “...Firstly, I reject the idea of large scale production of muskets for the Southern Alliance.”

The Demon King: “Really.”

The Female Paladin: “It’s not that I reject your good intentions or anything. However, the specialty of the muskets is that they can replace combat skill with numbers. In other words, with the same muskets and the same strategy, it is the side with more people which wins. Of course, with strategy, a smaller force can still achieve victory, but numbers matter more now than ever. This strategy of replacing combat skill with numbers is not suited for a professional army, it’s meant for equipping irregular soldiers with poor and short-term training. That is the precise aim of the Holy Crusaders. You cannot fight on the terms of the enemy when he has the advantage. For the Three Kingdoms to fight a battle of numbers is simply suicide. We may be fools, but this is common sense on the battlefield.”

The Demon King: “I see. Then this has no meaning.”

The Female Paladin: “The best thing would be to win a logistical victory. That would allow us to win even without fighting, regardless of the size of the enemy.”

The Demon King: “That is something closer to my expertise. Seems like we can cooperate on this.”

The Female Paladin: “But now we have to fear their desperation too. The desperate, last-ditch attack of twenty thousand starving soldiers would be enough to break any army.”

The Demon King: “Yeah.”

The Female Paladin: “Furthermore, other unexpected things could occur on the battlefield. That is something I paid a high price to learn this time. It would be too naïve to think we would win instantly with a logistical victory.”

The Demon King: “Yeah...”

The Female Paladin: “...”

The Chief Maid: “...”

The Female Paladin: “Demon King, if one were to try to increase the force—would that be a matter of increasing the amount of gunpowder?”

The Demon King: “That’s one way. But if you increase the amount of gunpowder, you’ll also need the tube to be able to withstand the impact. If you increase the size of the bullet, then of course the force increases as well.”

The Female Paladin: “If you increase the force, could you extend the range as well?”

The Demon King: “Of course. Basically, if you don’t increase the weight of the bullet, then by doubling the amount of gunpowder, you can also roughly double the range.”

The Female Paladin: “Isn’t there a way to just increase the range?”

The Demon King: “Range...”

The Female Paladin: “If we were to fight on the same battlefield, we would lose. So what’s the point of doing so? Isn’t that right? With enough range, it might be possible to fight outside the range of the enemy.”

The Demon King: “With enough range, outside the range of the enemy...”

——— **The New Territories of White Night, the Barracks Headquarters**

Crown Prince Marshal: “What do you think? Would you like to try leading that army?”

Green Ash King: “Doesn’t sound bad.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Heh.”

Green Ash King: “It’s true that they’re a ragtag, ill-disciplined bunch of peasants, but unlike the private armies of noblemen, whether good or bad, they’re at least simple.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “And what of the muskets?”

Green Ash King: “At present, they’re very powerful, but they have some shortcomings. This is what I feel. Have you read the paper I submitted?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “I’m reading it.”

Green Ash King: “In it I wrote that there was a state in which due to the humidity and the water content of the marshlands we were fighting in, the gunpowder got wet and could no longer fire. There were also instances of chamber explosions. They accounted for relatively few of the casualties, but there were still some damages inflicted by our own muskets.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hmm.”

Green Ash King: “There’s something interesting.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Interesting...?”

Green Ash King: “In previous battles fought with nobleman armies, we have always had to worry about the togetherness and commitment of the noblemen to the battle. But in this battle, this weakness has been amplified. To put it simply, these are all serfs who do not understand war, they’re completely ignorant peasants. It is natural for them all to be cowardly. But, that’s where it gets interesting.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “What problems do we have now?”

Green Ash King: “Data, please.”

Secretary: “Yes.”

Green Ash King: “May I assume the perspective of the Commanding Officer?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “By all means.”

Green Ash King: “First is the mustering of penetrative power. This is the gathering of substantial force from across the length of the battlefield to a specific point. It could be for a long period of time, or it could happen for just a single instance. Either way, this has to be accomplished.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hmm.”

Green Ash King: “In the past, with regards to this mustering, there has been a history of elevating the quality of the soldiers. In other words, the increase of the standards of individual soldiers’ equipment and weaponry, or the reform of commanders. However, this time, your Majesty’s soldiers, the Holy Crusaders, are not heavily equipped enough for this. Is that not correct?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hahahaha.”

Green Ash King: "Then, in that case, we must operate with the aim of improving training and regimental standards, but apart from improving penetrative power, we need to improve the weapon... In other words, I hope we can modify the weapon itself."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Hmm."

Green Ash King: "What about it?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "The new model of musket, a flintlock design will soon be unveiled. However, because of some issues with production quality, it will take a while for all the numbers to be there."

Green Ash King: "I don't mind. In any case, before we start to deploy them, they will require some field testing. The other issue is with defensive ability."

Crown Prince Marshal: "That was touched on in the reports as well."

Green Ash King: "Yeah, it is regrettable that muskets are only capable of fighting one volley at a time. Of course, it just means that the weapons need to be reloaded, but that's an additional gesture which has no place on the chaotic battlefield. Moreover, immediately after firing, the musketeer is left completely exposed."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Mmm."

Green Ash King: "With regards to this, I have taken the steps suggested by Your Majesty by attaching spearmen units to the musketeers and solved the issue."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Very good. Anything else?"

Green Ash King: "Nothing specifically with the muskets, but there are some differences in ideology with the nobility participating in the Crusade. Especially some measure of scorn and discord between the nobles and the musketeers. This is a problem."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Well, they are noblemen."

Green Ash King: "Yeah that's right. However, the musketeers, who form the centre of the penetrative power and the strategy, are ultimately a division of serfs. They definitely did not receive any specialist military training. However, when it comes to high speed military manoeuvres, we still undoubtedly need to rely on the heavy cavalry power of the nobility. For this reason, we still need to maintain a good relationship with them and the nobility. Musketeers aren't invincible soldiers after all."

Crown Prince Marshal: "With regards to that, do you have anything planned out?"

Green Ash King: "Well, I was thinking of what sort of country your Majesty would be trying to create."

Crown Prince Marshal: "..."

Green Ash King: "With the maintenance of the present system, the nobility and the royalty can cooperate to save each other. The system is such that there is a feudal lord

on top of the people, such that the royalty can control the people directly as it is in an *Absolute Monarchy**.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “...”

Green Ash King: “At present, the countries of the Central Continent function in anarchy, but in reality, the Church is like a very large ring, within which the countries are like trapped wild horses. Within this group of horses, the Holy Empire is like an older brother whose influence cannot be underestimated.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Haha, please don’t exaggerate. The Holy Empire is no more than a country, like any other, which believes in the Holy Spirit. These Crusades are also formed from the free hearts of the myriad believers from the many countries to the many nobles...”

Green Ash King: “Hahahahahaha. But this freedom is only allowed and encouraged by certain more powerful elements.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “—Hmm, it’s hard to say what the Primarch is thinking, but I myself believe that the noblemen are indispensable. It’s just that the times and the resources available to these men have changed.”

Green Ash King: “With regards to that, he who sows the seeds reaps the harvest. I believe we can devise strict military regulatory stipulations based on those used by the warrior class. The nobility and the royalty should take the initiative in acting based on these rules, so that they can set an example for the people to follow. Moreover, we must reward those nobility who respond well to the scheme. We need to ensure that we take matters into hand and enforce some discipline, so that we can reduce the friction between our forces. We are all part of the effort against the Demon Race after all.

“It may be a bit unprecedented to use mercenaries, but to begin with, mercenaries have always been supplementary soldiers in time when manpower is short. In this war, the nobility have their private armies, which are essentially mercenaries; but the Holy Crusaders lack mercenary forces of our own. So it should not be a problem to hire some. Those noblemen who have a problem with it... Well, we can just declare them heretics.” *Chuckles.*

Crown Prince Marshal: “I suppose this is what is meant by a capable commander.”

Green Ash King: “In that case, I will begin the disciplinary reforms.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “I await your success.”

Green Ash King: “Thanks to your instructions, the range of the musket, the timing between shots, and the fuses have been improved. I hope you will look into improving the direction of fire next time.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “I expect much from you as well, young hero King of the Mist.”

Green Ash King: “Haha.”

Explanation

Absolute Monarchy: This refers to a system in which the King is given absolute authority over his subjects. There are noblemen, but they receive their positions and responsibilities directly from the King, and the government has limited powers. In Europe, from the 16th to the 17th century, the feudal system began to evolve towards an absolute monarchy. The powers of the nobility went down, while due to the establishment of standing armies, the authority of the King went up. As a result, this form of government steadily gained momentum. However, a truly absolute monarchy with authority vested completely and solely in the King has never existed in history. Even though one may be an absolute monarchy, Kings have always had to consider the intentions of the nobility and the merchant guilds on affairs of government and politics. However, in comparison to the feudal times, the King had much more deciding power, and his individual will held much more sway over national decisions.

——- The New Territories of White Night, the Halls of the Palace

Strategist: “What is this?”

Holy Imperial Soldier: “Well, umm... Uhh.”

Holy Imperial Cavalry: “We don’t have the expected upon amount of saltpetre?”

Strategist: “We don’t? Stop fooling around. Did you scour the palace and confirm it!”

Holy Imperial Cavalry: “Yes, of course we’ve confirmed it. There should be 64 wooden chests, but...”

Strategist: “So was there anything else in those wooden chests in the warehouse?”

Holy Imperial Soldier: “They were empty.”

Holy Imperial Cavalry: “It seems that only the wooden chests near the entrance of the warehouse were filled with saltpetre, all the others were empty.”

Strategist: “...”

Holy Imperial Cavalry: “What should we do?”

Strategist: “And what of the other things?”

Holy Imperial Cavalry: “We have about 50,000 sets of clothing and cold weather apparel. With the present numbers, we have enough food to last roughly another month.”

Strategist: “...”

Holy Imperial Soldier: “Moreover, we are in the midst of constructing ships, but we severely lack tar and equipment.”

Strategist: “Firstly, we can try to collect taxes from the settlements within the realm of White Night. We can probably cover the costs of providing for the necessary tools and cold weather apparel.”

Holy Imperial Cavalry: “No, that’s... According to our reports, the Kingdom of White Night is an extremely poor country. Moreover, most of the settlements have been deserted... The large majority of them have fled to neighbouring countries as refugees.”

Strategist: “...To the impoverished countries of the South?”

Holy Imperial Cavalry: “This is just something I’ve heard, but, it appears that the royalty and nobility of many countries have already joined hands with the merchants in order to purchase goods from their countries and have begun exporting them. Even within the Holy Crusaders, significant levels of inflation are being felt, particularly for these imported luxury goods.”

Strategist: “...Mmm, how arbitrary.”

Holy Imperial Soldier: “...”

Strategist: “I got it. If it’s about prices, we can try to take appropriate action in collaboration with the Church and the other countries. We can streamline the import and export infrastructure and enact a price ceiling for essential goods.”

Holy Imperial Soldier: “Yes.”

Strategist: “With regards to saltpetre, we will still need to investigate more. To begin with, it was difficult for us to predict from a distance that the Demons of the Pale would only bring half the agreed amount of saltpetre with them. I fear somebody else is now in possession of the saltpetre. Convoys formed from hundreds of loaded caravans are not exactly easy to disguise. Try to check with the refugees if they have information.”

Holy Imperial Cavalry: “Yes! Understood!”

——— The Kingdom of the Lake, the Capital, the Headquarters of the Merchant’s Union

Female Union Employee: “The price of charcoal imported from the Central Continent is now 320% compared to last year. It’s probably got something to do with the 70% decrease in quantity sold. The quantity sold of ores has also gone up sharply.”

Branch Chief: “The reports have come in. Even if these are the accounts of secret factories, in order to obtain enough charcoal for their purposes, they needed to put up a significant portion of their ore supply on the market.”

Young Merchant: “Please purchase what you can.”

Branch Chief: “Similarly, even though this information comes from our brothel networks, it seems that the secret factories and the metal guilds in the Kingdom of Copper are also concerned about the lack of charcoal. We have unconfirmed reports from yesterday that the factories were operating at only half the efficiency.”

Female Union Employee: “Just goes to show how interconnected everything is.”

Young Merchant: “Moreover... Our opponents are the Holy Empire and the Church behind them. These are crazy beasts, as powerful as massive dragons. If we do not exercise prudence, we will be crushed.”

Branch Chief: “We will need to expand our net?”

Young Merchant: “Yes.”

Door opens.

Union Employee: “Report. We have secured charcoal from the Kingdom of the Lake. The profit made is approximately 1,800,000 gold pieces.”

Young Merchant: “...The Kingdom of the Lake? Good, let’s rely on reinforcements now.”

Branch Chief: “Reinforcements? You mean the Southern Alliance?”

Young Merchant: “Yeah, the Southern Alliance seems to have gotten a hitherto unknown military commander. Let’s send them a greeting. — This letter goes to the Disciple Merchant in the Kingdom of Winter.”

Female Union Employee: “Understood. I’ll send it as soon as possible.”

Young Merchant: “Of course.”

Branch Chief: “Then our net of encirclement is almost complete.”

Young Merchant: “Indeed. The Kingdom of Branches and the Kingdom of the Lake are now members of the Southern Alliance. There is no place for countries like the Kingdom of Copper to carry out their orders. The secret factories of the Kingdom of Copper still rely on the Kingdom of the Lake to import their resources across the lake. Now, the Kingdom of the Lake has tariffs imposed on the movement of charcoal across the lake. This is a strategy to protect the Kingdom of Winter, but it can also be an economic attack. The kingdoms of the Central Continent are too used to peace, they have problems handling such intense issues.”

Branch Chief nods.

Young Merchant: “For the time being, let us set the tariff at 60 gold pieces per caravan of charcoal.”

Union Employee: “Sixty?! That’s more expensive than the charcoal itself!”

Young Merchant: “The thing about tariffs is that there is an option to simply not buy the goods. It is completely permissible not to buy if one finds the price too high. In this way we can suppress the quantity of the good demanded.”

Union Employee: “Un, understood.”

Cough, cough.

Young Merchant: “...Not yet.”

Branch Chief: “Has anything happened?”

Young Merchant: “I was just thinking it’s not enough.”

Branch Chief: (I just saw him smile. This guy... He’s got an evil feel.)

Young Merchant: “With the chains we have created, we don’t even have enough to restrain one-tenth of the ferocious dragon. At this rate, we won’t be able to stop the war.”

Branch Chief: “Councillor, do you intend to stop the war?”

Young Merchant: “You mean the Holy Crusaders? No. I have no interest in stopping armies. We still have much else we need to do... It would be really troublesome to act carelessly and destroy everything we have worked towards.”

Branch Chief: “But this Holy Crusades is supported in full by the Primarch himself. At this rate, they can simply swallow everything.”

Young Merchant: “Yes, indeed. That is why they can act so crazily. — What an insane affair.”

Branch Chief: “...”

Young Merchant: “Their ambitions are like a blazing inferno.”

Branch Chief: “Indeed. It’s an inferno fuelled by the permission granted by the Church, to fulfil the wishes of the nobility greedy to gain new lands in the Demon World. “

Young Merchant: “It’s a snatch and grab. Well, to anyone else, it would be a condemnable act; but this time, they can do it without anyone else condemning it. Of course, that is our way of life. — But there must be limits.”

Branch Chief: “Eh...?”

Young Merchant: “Greed is a facet of human nature. If properly applied, one can gain riches. However, that is if you have the discipline to employ greed as a weapon. If you become a tool of greed... What awaits is destruction. As merchants, we know this very well.”

Branch Chief: “Definitely.”

Young Merchant: "...Well, then. Even though the border situation of the Kingdom of Metal has entered a lull, the economic battle of us merchants has only just entered the *Ashura*. Shake off everything we can't deal with. That's the way to deal with things, isn't it, Mister Disciple?"

Explanation

Ashura: One of the six realms of Buddhism (Deva, Human, Ashura, Animal, Preta and Naraka). It refers to world of endless war without peace.

——— **The Village of Wintering, the Manor of the Demon King, the Kitchen**

Blub, blub, blub.

The Demon King: "It's boiling, Hero."

The Hero: "Put in a pinch of salt."

The Demon King: "Like this?"

The Hero: "That's a handful."

The Demon King: "Is that wrong?"

The Hero: "It's the same, isn't it? Salt is salt."

Blub, blub, blub.

The Demon King: "Mmmm, it doesn't make much of a difference, I guess."

The Hero: "Let's add these sausages."

Glub, glub, glub.

The Demon King: "And?"

The Hero: "Next, add sliced cabbages."

The Demon King: "Slicing, eh?"

The Hero: "Let me handle that." *Shing! Shing!*

Plop!

The Demon King: "Perfect!"

The Hero: "Ahh, I almost scared myself."

The Demon King: "Is this alright? Can we eat already?"

The Hero: “No, wait. Let it heat up first. Let’s give it another 5 minutes for the mushrooms.”

The Demon King: “5 minutes?”

The Hero: “Yes, 5 minutes. In other words, three hundred seconds.”

The Demon King: “Isn’t it ready?”

The Hero: “How can it be so fast!”

The Demon King: “You know I’m not so good with measuring time.”

The Hero: “No choice then... One, two, three, four...”

The Demon King: “...”

The Hero: “Twenty five, twenty six, twenty seven...”

Blub, blub, blub.

The Demon King: “Hmm... Let’s give it a try.”

The Hero: “Thirty four, thirty five, thirty six...”

The Demon King: “Yeah, it tastes great.”

The Hero: “Fifty two, fifty three, fifty four...”

Door opens.

The Female Paladin: “Oh. There you are... What are you doing?”

The Demon King: “We’re just making supper.”

The Hero: “Seventy eight, seventy nine, eighty...”

The Female Paladin: “Why?”

The Demon King: “The food we’ve had recently has been terrible. So we’re trying a recipe we managed to get from the Chief Maid. It uses minimal ingredients for maximum taste...”

The Hero: “Hundred and one, hundred and two, hundred and three...”

The Female Paladin: “That’s very interesting. What’s on the menu?”

The Demon King: “Mushrooms, sausage and cabbage. And bread.”

The Female Paladin: “Really? That sounds like it can’t fail. And what is the Hero doing?”

The Hero: “Hundred and twenty, hundred and twenty-one, hundred and twenty-two...”

The Demon King: “Yeah, he’s counting. The mushrooms need to be cooked for exactly five minutes.”

The Female Paladin: “Can’t you be more spontaneous?”

The Demon King: “Spontaneous?! How much more spontaneous do we need to be to make food?!”

The Female Paladin: “No, isn’t cooking a spontaneous thing?”

The Demon King: “That’s not true. It relies on perfect harmony created from perfect preparation and portioning, and it’s only basic to follow the order of things.”

The Female Paladin: “Is that so?”

Blub, blub, blub.

The Hero: “Two hundred and twenty, two hundred and twenty-one, two hundred and twenty-two...”

The Female Paladin: “It looks like the water level has really gone down.”

The Demon King: “It’s due to evaporation. That’s when water turns to a gaseous state and dissipates into the air. Logically speaking, it’s the correct thing.”

The Female Paladin: “It’s not just normal boiling?”

The Demon King: “No, it’s evaporation. It’s a scientifically proven phenomenon.”

The Female Paladin: “Hmm.”

The Hero: “Two hundred and thirty-five, two hundred and thirty-six—”

Blub, blub, blub.

The Demon King: “It’s almost time.”

The Hero: “Two hundred and forty, two hundred and forty-one—”

The Female Paladin: “Shouldn’t we take out some plates?”

The Hero: “Now that you say it.”

The Female Paladin: “Two hundred and seventy-six, two hundred and seventy-seven—”

The Demon King: “Hero, it’s almost time to put out the fire!”

The Hero: “Got it! Burst of Frost!”

Whoosh!

The Demon King: “It’s finished!!”

The Hero: “Ahh, what a long battle.”

The Female Paladin: “...”

The Demon King: “Right, it’s time to eat then. Hero! It’s time to share our victory.”

The Hero: “Hey! Demon King! When did the Female Paladin get here?”

The Female Paladin: “No, I’m good. I was just passing by and felt curious, but I wouldn’t want to get in the way of your education from the Chief Maid.”

The Demon King: “Really? Let’s eat!”

The Hero: “Let’s eat!”

The Demon King: “...”

The Hero: “...”

The Demon King: “Ugh, why is it so salty?!”

The Hero: “My mouth, my mouth?!”

The Female Paladin: “Did you add too much salt?”

The Demon King: “How could we? We followed the instructions.”

The Hero: “What an unbelievable taste.”

The Demon King: “I need some water.”

The Female Paladin: “My, my.” *Pours water.*

The Hero: “Me too.”

The Female Paladin: “Ahh, I can’t watch. Here, hand it over.”

The Demon King: “Eh? You can’t eat this.”

The Hero: “It’s way too salty. It’s cursed.”

The Female Paladin: “It’s a waste to just throw it away. The Holy Order of the Lake is renowned for our virtue, prudence, and diligence.”

The Demon King: “That’s true.”

The Hero: “But it’s definitely inedible.”

The Female Paladin: “Well, the taste will be affected, but there’s no choice.”

Glub, glub, glub.

The Demon King: “Eh?”

The Female Paladin: “For the time being, we can reduce the saltiness by adding water. Then, by frying some of the fat from the bacon..... And maybe by adding some sausage and sliced cabbages...”

Chop, chop, chop.

The Demon King: “Whoaa.”

The Female Paladin: “It’s a bit difficult to control the fire on this stove, so we’ll use to distance to control the heat. If we move it away from the fire, it’ll be low heat. Then when it starts to give off a good smell, we’ll add six boiled eggs.”

Whistles.

The Hero: “Looks like you can really cook!”

The Female Paladin: “After adding the eggs in, we put on the lid, move it away from the fire and wait. Until it starts to steam.”

The Hero: “What number should I start counting from?”

The Female Paladin: “We’ll go by instinct. It would be great if you could take out the plates.”

The Hero: “With pleasure!”

The Female Paladin: “Alright.” *Raises lid. Inhales deeply.*

The Demon King: “Looks great.”

The Hero: “It looks delicious!”

The Female Paladin: “...The two of you somehow have the same reactions for everything.”

The Demon King: “Mmm, maybe it’s because we’ve lived together for so long. We’ve got a certain bond.”

The Hero: “Or rather, it feels like people with empty stomachs have a strong sense of camaraderie.”

The Female Paladin: “Under one roof, eh... What a handicap.”

The Demon King: “Can we eat yet?”

The Hero: “Is it ready yet, Female Paladin?”

The Female Paladin: “Not yet. It doesn’t matter if you have forks in both hands. In addition, we’re going to slice some of this hardened cheese over the top. And it’s done. Pass the plates. I’ll divide it into halves.”

The Demon King: “Yeahhhh.”

The Hero: "It smells wonderful."

The Female Paladin: "Seems like we've had a good relationship recently, doesn't it?"

The Demon King: "Our relationship has always been good from the start."

The Hero: "Well, yeah."

The Female Paladin: "That's..."

The Demon King: "It's delicious. Looks like you can really cook."

The Hero: "Now that you say it, you were cooking in the past too."

The Female Paladin: "It's a basic necessity that us Paladins try to reduce the burden we place on others. Well, the best cook among the party is actually that old pervert."

The Demon King: "Pervert?"

The Hero: "The Butler of the Kingdom of Winter."

The Female Paladin: "It was a long time ago."

The Demon King: "Really?"

The Demon King: "Oh right, so what do you have to do today?"

The Hero: "Would you like to make an omelette with us?"

The Female Paladin: "Ah, well, yeah, I don't have anything important today."

The Hero: "Is that so?"

The Female Paladin: "We'll have to touch up on our observations from the battle."

——— The South of the Kingdom of Metal, the Surrounding Forests, the Camp of the Tribe of the Fang

Warrior of the Fang: "Gahahahaha!"

Little Maid Sister: "Hello, beardy-beardy!"

Warrior of the Fang: "Hey don't worry about that up there. Here, if you fall you might get injured, you know?"

Little Maid Sister: "It's alright! I'm very used to cleaning things in high places!"

Disciple Soldier: "Hey, Little Maid Sister, don't make trouble please."

Warrior of the Fang: "Gahaha! There's no Fang who would be troubled by a girl of this weight."

Disciple Soldier: “I see...”

Footsteps.

The East Fortress Base Commander: “Yo!”

Disciple Soldier: “I apologise for intruding.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “You’re really persistent, aren’t you! You keep going into the forest. Is there something interesting there?”

Disciple Soldier: “As interesting things go, I’m in a whole new world I’ve never heard of nor seen in my life, isn’t that interesting enough.”

Little Maid Sister: “Yep, yep.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “That’s true. Oh?... And who is this young lady?”

Disciple Soldier: “Well, this is my sister.”

Little Maid Sister: “Hello!”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “How spirited!”

Warrior of the Fang: “She’s a very interesting young lady.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “Is that so?”

Human Mercenary: “She’s somehow become very involved. Hahahaha.”

Disciple Soldier: “She came to bring some provisions for the soldiers.”

Warrior of the Fang: “They were delicious.”

Disciple Soldier: “She may be very young, but she’s a fabulous chef.”

Little Maid Sister: “I made lots and lots!”

Youth of the Fang: “It’s really delicious.”

Warrior of the Fang: “Yeah, it’s really something!”

Human Mercenary: “Another serving please.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “You brought enough food for everyone?”

Disciple Soldier: “Oh no. We brought the ingredients. All we brought along in our carriages were pots... This little girl slipped onto the convoy without me noticing, how troublesome.”

Little Maid Sister: “I didn’t want to let him go alone!”

Disciple Soldier: “This camp in the middle of the forest is very, very far away from the city, you know.”

Little Maid Sister: “But I want to hear about the Demon World.”

Disciple Soldier: “It was curiosity that killed the cat.”

Little Maid Sister: “I bet there’s loads of new food in the Demon World. I’ve never been there. So at least I want to hear about it.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “Hahaha, what an energetic little girl.”

Disciple Soldier: “I apologise for her cheekiness.”

Little Maid Sister: “I learnt it from you!”

Disciple Soldier: “I am nothing of the sort. I am a bladesman honed under the Female Paladin herself.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “Hoho.”

Disciple Soldier: “In any case, we bring supplies today.”

Little Maid Sister: “Yup! Yup! Please eat a lot today. And give as much feedback as you can on the food.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “I see, I see. What a chef you are.”

Little Maid Sister: “I am the future Imperial Chef after all.”

Footsteps.

The Silver Tiger Lord: “What’s this?”

Disciple Soldier: “I apologise for intruding upon you today as well.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Hmm.”

Disciple Soldier: “I hear you are about to depart.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “I’ve received the orders today. We are to rendezvous with our reconnaissance unit and leave the day after tomorrow.”

Disciple Soldier: “I see...”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “This place is very far from our homes. My people are also eager to get back. We will have to return by departing from the shores of the Kingdom of Winter, since the lands of White Night are presently occupied by the Crusaders.”

Disciple Soldier: “I see.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Now that the war is over, our presence is no longer required.”

Disciple Soldier: “In that case, before it happens, I will not allow you to go without sharing a cup of wine with me.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “...”

Disciple Soldier: “I believe the liquor in the Human World is not too bad. This is some very strong wine from the Kingdom of Metal. It’s nothing elegant or opulent, but it is the wine of the earth.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “...And you’re treating us to this feast on top of it?”

Disciple Soldier: “Please enjoy your fill of the food.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “It is terrifyingly good. For such a young girl, no less.”

Disciple Soldier: “My sister is rather special.”

Little Maid Sister: “Please have it while it’s hot, and eat as much as you like.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Thank you.”

Disciple Soldier: “And as much wine as you’d like as well.”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Mmm.”

Glug, glug, glug...

Disciple Soldier: “I hear there is no moon in the Demon World.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “Yeah.” *Munch, munch.*

The Silver Tiger Lord: “You mean that white thing?”

Disciple Soldier: “To eat a splendid meal with brave warriors from distant lands. The moon shines bright on me tonight.”

——— **The Kingdom of Winter, in Front of a House in the City Centre**

“Nyohohohohoho.”

The Female Paladin: “...”

“Well! This is wonderful! Fukurami, Maromi. What beautiful ladies I have around me!”

“Didn’t I tell you to leave your wounds alone?”

“No no no no no, it recovers better this way. But look at that bounciness.”

“Kyaa! Heeheehee. Bounce bounce ♪”

The Female Paladin: “...”

“Let me join in too ♪”

“So energetic!”

“Bounce bounce. Nyohohohoho!”

“Heehee. Bounce bounce ♪ ”

Opens door.

The Female Paladin: “Excuse me.”

Butler: “...”

Nurse: “...” *Gasps.*

The Female Paladin: “I think it’s best that you stop whatever it is you’re doing.”

Butler: “What? I’m not doing anything?!”

——— **The Kingdom of Winter, Inside a House in the City Centre**

The Female Paladin: “Are alright, grandpa?”

Butler: “Nyohoho. Don’t you worry. I am nothing more than a grizzled, old soldier. Old soldiers don’t die, they just fade away... When that leaf falls to the ground, so too will this old man.”

The Female Paladin: “Why are you suddenly so interested in dying? You were so energetic just a minute ago.”

Butler: “That. Well. Nothing inappropriate happened.”

The Female Paladin: ““Let me join in too!””

Butler: “What! Where did you hear that?”

The Female Paladin: “I wish I had heard... nothing at all.”

Butler: “In any case, nothing untoward took place. If anything ever did take place, my conscience as a man with the heart of a man is completely clear.”

The Female Paladin: “My. It looks like your age is really no obstacle to you.”

Butler: “Nyohohohoho!”

The Female Paladin: “It’s not a compliment.”

Butler: “Damn.”

The Female Paladin: “In any case, I am relieved that you appear to be well.”

Butler: “Well, I have been training even here.”

The Female Paladin: “Have you been undergoing therapy?”

Butler: “Yes. And I am much better. Thank you for your concern.”

The Female Paladin: "I just thought it would be proper to pay you a visit."

Butler: "That makes me happy."

The Female Paladin: "It's great that you're being taken care of. By girls with huge breasts."

Butler: "Nyohohohoho!"

The Female Paladin: "By girls with huge breasts."

Butler: "Ahem. Well. Thank you very much."

The Female Paladin: "..."

Butler: "What is it?"

The Female Paladin: "...Actually."

Butler: "..."

The Female Paladin: "...Yeah."

Butler: "What is it? If it's about your relationship with the Hero, perhaps you might want to borrow some wisdom from this old man."

The Female Paladin: "Why do you know?!"

Butler: "I am known as a pillar of wisdom, hahahaha!"

The Female Paladin: "Really?"

Butler: "It was very clear from the very start that you had a thing for the Hero. Nyohohohoho!"

The Female Paladin: "Really..."

Butler: "Yes, really. Even when we were travelling as a party, the two of you have always had your sights on the Hero. He truly is a naïve, inattentive boy. Nyohohohoho."

The Female Paladin: "Two of you?"

Butler: "Oh, don't mind me. In any case, how far have you gone?"

The Female Paladin: "What do you mean?"

Butler: "In your relationship with the Hero."

The Female Paladin: "Well, he accepted my sword. And I became his."

Butler: "...Sigh."

The Female Paladin: "What's with the sigh?!"

Butler: “Well, I suppose entering into the Knights’ Vows is a sort of advancement in your relationship. As a Butler, I cannot be heartless—I shall laugh for you. Nyohohohoho!”

The Female Paladin: “Stop laughing. I know what you mean.”

Butler: “Well, you are both shy people. And your target is the Hero, after all. I won’t say it’s an easy target.”

The Female Paladin: “Really?”

Butler: “Yeah. The Demon King is having trouble too.”

The Female Paladin: “Which reminds me. Have you reported the whole Demon King thing to the Lone Winter King?”

Butler: “That is something out of my hands. When the time is right, the young man will know.”

The Female Paladin: “I see... When you mean trouble, do you mean the Hero...”

Butler: “?”

The Female Paladin: “The Hero doesn’t actually like us?”

Butler: “No, no, that’s not what I mean. It’s just that the Hero is not an easy target. You have much ahead of you.”

The Female Paladin: “What exactly?”

Butler: “Mmmm.”

The Female Paladin: “My old friend. Can’t you give me a hint? I’m a bit bashful asking your perverted insights, but in order to close the gap between me and the Demon King, perhaps there are some strategies I could borrow from you.”

Butler: “Gap, eh?”

The Female Paladin: “Yes.”

Butler: “I don’t think there’s a gap.”

The Female Paladin: “That’s not true. The two of them were making sausages and mushrooms together, there was really the atmosphere of a relationship...”

Butler: “That may be so, but the target is the Hero.”

The Female Paladin: “I don’t understand.”

Butler: “Well, do you remember that day at the City of Dunes?”

The Female Paladin: “Yeah. We were travelling.”

Butler: “The Hero and I left the camp and gallivanted until the morning, and we really pissed you off.”

The Female Paladin: “Yes, I remember. Why are we talking about this?”

Butler: “And after that, there was the quest for the singer. And the Hero happily flew out for it like some falcon or some hawk, to be the mighty saviour of that damsel.”

The Female Paladin: “Makes me angry just thinking about it.”

Butler: “No, no. It’s just such a normal thing for a guy to do.”

The Female Paladin: “?”

Butler: “To get closer to a girl and impress her, no matter who you are, every guy will experience this desire at some point or another. But the Hero feels this more than anyone else. Do you know why?”

The Female Paladin: “Because he’s a skirtchaser?”

Butler: “Well, ahem... I wouldn’t exactly say that is false. The truth is a bit different. The Hero is actually very scared. It’s because he carries that much power within him. If he started to be despised by the people, they would think of him as some kind of monster, which is scary. It’s because of this that he has to behave nicely to everyone, to be kind and to make people happy.”

The Female Paladin: “I don’t think he’s a monster. I don’t despise him.”

Butler: “It would be great if everyone felt that way...”

The Female Paladin: “...”

Butler: “Moreover...”

The Female Paladin: “?”

Butler: “When you’re a special person, it can be very scary.”

The Female Paladin: “?”

Butler: “He may be a Hero, but he’s a coward when it comes to people disliking him. Because of this cowardice, he decided to go and confront the Demon King himself. He may be special, and so he can think of doing such things, but—the reason why he left is surely because of fear. The Hero has a deep relationship with both you and the Demon King, within which he may be just a fool who can’t read the situation; but without that, with his ignorance and inattentiveness, he would be liable to seek to escape from the difficult future he has to face.”

The Female Paladin: “Is that so?”

Butler: “—Maybe. Nyohohohoho. I can’t say for sure. That’s just what I feel.”

The Female Paladin: “Yeah...”

Butler: “Hey, don’t be so down. This grandpa has got a terrific strategy.”

The Female Paladin: “Really?”

Butler: “Of course.” *Smiles.*

The Female Paladin: “And what’s that?”

Butler: “Firstly, don’t think of him as a human.”

The Female Paladin: “?!”

Butler: “A horse. Think of the Hero as a horse.”

The Female Paladin: “Why a horse? Oh wait.”

Butler: “What is it?”

The Female Paladin: “I’ve got to take notes.”

Butler: “Hohoho. You’re really serious.”

The Female Paladin: “He’s even munching straw.”

Butler: “Hahaha! My brilliant plan will definitely see you through. Nyohohoho!”

The Female Paladin: “What do I do now that he’s a horse?”

Butler: “Well, to train a horse, you’ve got to raise it correctly, right? So how do you take care of a horse?”

The Female Paladin: “Talk to it.”

Butler: “And?”

The Female Paladin: “Touch it. Pat and rub its head. Brush it. When I touch it, I feel that the horse feels happy.”

Butler: “That’s correct.”

The Female Paladin: “And I give it carrots and apples as well.”

Butler: “That’s a good progression.”

The Female Paladin: “Is it really that simple?!”

Butler: “When it comes to boys, the basics are rather the same.”

The Female Paladin: “Really...”

Butler: “But after that, you’ve got to do a frontal assault.”

The Female Paladin: “Frontal assault.” *Scribbling.*

Butler: "You've got to tell him what you want to his face."

The Female Paladin: "Tell him what I want."

Butler: "Whether you want to kiss, or even to hug."

The Female Paladin: "That's too much."

Butler: "The Hero is your target, so if you don't say anything, nothing will happen. On the whole, the Hero is as aimless as a horse. When the horse gets lost, you have to lead it out by the hand and show it the way."

The Female Paladin: "That's...true."

Butler: "Of course, you've got to build a relationship of trust, and not just throw yourself at him. For that reason, daily contact is an important factor."

The Female Paladin: "Ugh... So that's how it is?"

Butler: "What is it?"

The Female Paladin: "The Demon King is always touching his hair like he's some little kid... But maybe this is part of her long-term strategy..."

Butler: "I don't really understand, but I can definitely feel your murderous intent."

The Female Paladin: "No, I've got it under control, master."

Butler: "Master?!"

The Female Paladin: "I'm borrowing your expertise, so you're the master."

Butler: "Nyohohohoho! How nice."

The Female Paladin: "Next is, well..."

Butler: "What is it?"

The Female Paladin: "No, it's okay. It's time for reality."

Butler: "Hahaha."

The Female Paladin: "I will have to rely on my own strength for reality."

Butler: "Well, well, that's a bit shallow, don't you think?"

The Female Paladin: "Eh?"

Butler: "Your strengths, your weaknesses, they all form part of your trademark."

The Female Paladin: "?"

Butler: "Your trademark is that of a person who confidently strides on the battlefield and wins the war!"

The Female Paladin: “That is true.”

Butler: “I have one present for such a Female Paladin.”

Rummages about.

Butler: “It’s the ultimate equipment made from fabric. It is of course too early to use right now. But when your heart is ready, open this bag.”

The Female Paladin: “I don’t really understand, but I appreciate your kindness! I’ll give it a try and see how it goes!”

Butler: “Nyohohohohoho! Anything is fine as long as it’s interesting. Do your best, Female Paladin!”

——— **The Village of Wintering, the Manor of the Demon King, the Study**

The Demon King: “Ughhhhh.”

The Chief Maid: “Does your back hurt, your Majesty?”

The Demon King: “Mmm, it’s just a bit stiff.”

The Chief Maid: “Shall I massage your shoulders for you?”

The Demon King: “Please.”

The Chief Maid: “Here we go then.”

The Demon King: “Mmm...”

The Chief Maid: “The Female Paladin’s demands sure are stubborn, aren’t they?”

The Demon King: “Very much so. In order to meet her requests, we need to advance production and metallurgy techniques. We’ll need to increase the toolmaking technology as well... Looks like I’ll have to go and check the Library.”

The Chief Maid: “Indeed.”

The Demon King: “We really can’t do anything about the Crusaders.”

The Chief Maid: “Is that really a problem?”

The Demon King: “Eh?”

The Chief Maid: “No, it’s just I don’t think they’re that big a threat.”

The Demon King: “Really?”

The Chief Maid: “Yes.”

The Demon King: “What do you mean?”

The Chief Maid: “Their leaders number only in the hundreds, it’s a simple matter to just kill them. Neither your Majesty nor the Hero needs to dirty your hands to accomplish this. It may be presumptuous, but...”

The Demon King: “Well, yes, that is true.”

The Chief Maid: “...”

The Demon King: “But the problem is, we require their consent.”

The Chief Maid: “Consent?”

The Demon King: “Yeah, consent.”

The Chief Maid: “I don’t understand.”

The Demon King: “Well... To put it better, we’ve cleared the majority of the issues I highlighted at the start. For example, the issues of famine in the Human World were greatly resolved by the introduction of potato and corn cultivation. Of course, there are still issues of governance which need to be solved in order to truly cure famine permanently, but I believe the problem has been greatly and significantly reduced. Moreover, with the Mage’s help, vaccinations have begun to take root across the world. In both the Demon and Human Worlds, population increases are taking place. The Human World has seen the birth of the Southern Alliance as an economic and political union, and while there are still military tensions, as soon as these are resolved, I believe we can try to build diplomatic infrastructure with the Central Continent. Resolving issues with the Central Continent is now the key to peace. Development speed and security will be greatly aided without the development of two competing spheres of influence.

“Moreover, with the many conferences taking place, the Demon World has managed to end its long periods of inter-tribal conflict and, by resolving incidents, is moving closer towards a greater sense of unity. For a tribal society like the Demon World’s to accept outsiders like the Human race will likely act as a sort of social lubricant to bring the tribes closer together. The Demon World is moving towards a closer sense of solidarity, away from the previous disparate elements. Right now, with the economic trade plan in motion, the different tribes have even united to build a bridge together. We have entered a new era in Demon history. — If you think about it, we have accomplished much of what we should, with the ‘Famine in the Human World’, the ‘Independence of the South’ and the ‘Coalition of the Demon Tribes’. Of course, there are still more deep problems, and we will have many more troubles ahead of us. However, these are not insurmountable obstacles. I have no intention to bear this responsibility on my own. This is the world we all live in together, so it would be problematic if we did not all contribute to its development together as well.”

The Chief Maid: “Indeed.”

The Demon King: “However, to do that, with the war we have going on right now... To put it simply, we can’t have this Central Church sanctioned Third Crusade intending to

entrench and secure the system. We cannot continue to have this pointless, reactionary war. It may be their wish, but I cannot understand their crazed fanaticism. However, this is a lesson in how we can mobilise people to work for greater causes like removing famine and poverty.

“If my observations are correct, we can remove the root cause... In other words, while we can raise the self-sufficiency of food supplies for the countries and even reduce accumulated conflict by encouraging dialogue between tribes, whether or not these methods can resolve the issue is still circumspect. The leadership of the Holy Crusaders still has the ability to ruin these plans, but with the religious fervour that they command at their fingertips, they can also remove and disarm the reactionary uprising permanently. This is a very delicate issue. We need their ‘consent’ if we want to do things well, and we can’t do that by assassination.”

The Chief Maid: “I see...?”

The Demon King: “...That the Demons are killing the Humans is true. That the Humans are killing the Demons is also true. Between them, there is some true animosity. Even if we know we have to move forward, it is hard to take that step. In order to prevent further blood from spilling and worsening the situation, we cannot take such measures.”

The Chief Maid: “Then how should we resolve it?”

The Demon King: “That’s what I’m worrying about.”

The Chief Maid: “How difficult.”

The Demon King: “Aghh, it hurts!”

The Chief Maid: “Oh, I’m sorry.”

The Demon King: “I feel like I’ve done something wrong or missed something out.”

The Chief Maid: “Really?”

The Demon King: “I’ve placed the emphasis on resolving food issues, employment issues, diplomatic issues, and economic issues. Without resolving economic issues, the world can never be a happy place. But by simply resolving economic issues, the world still cannot be a happy place... What is this happiness? How do we achieve it? That’s a difficult question.”

——— **The Kingdom of Winter, the Winter Palace, the Ministry of Finance**

Disciple Merchant: (60 gold pieces?... Rather than defence, this is clearly an attack. This is clearly meant as a barrier to trade. The Central Continent probably does not have the talent to recognise such a crafty weapon...

This means that the key is to not let the situation develop to the point where the already impoverished Southern Alliance is seen as pouring oil onto the blazing fire of the

Central Continent. This is a very high risk situation, and while it may result in large gains, it could also lead to high tensions that could force the market to crash completely... Indeed, the merchants who could pull off such a risky target can only be found in the Union.)

Disciple Merchant: "Sigh."

Assistant: "What is it?"

Disciple Merchant: "It's nothing. I received a strange letter from a strange person."

Assistant: "A strange letter? But Milady's letters are very well-written."

Disciple Merchant: "Huh?"

Assistant: "Ah, it's nothing!"

Disciple Merchant: "What a strange fellow."

Assistant: "So, what sort of scary letter is it?"

Disciple Merchant: "Well uhh, the letter says something like—In order to prevent the enemies of the Southern Alliance from building some strange weapons, let us raise the price of charcoal. Shall we work together? I look forward to it."

Assistant: "Isn't that a nice letter?"

Disciple Merchant: "Huh?"

Assistant: "Eh? Then. By using such weapons, aren't we just forcing the enemy to go to war?"

Disciple Merchant: "..."

Assistant: "That's... true."

Disciple Merchant: "No, well, that's just one side of the story."

Assistant: "War is a bad thing. There are many soldiers who can't go home, and we have to eat bad food."

Disciple Merchant: "..."

Assistant: "?"

Disciple Merchant: (What a dilemma... I've been trying to shield his Majesty from making such difficult decisions, but I've got no choice now. It is just as the fool says, lives are truly inexchangeable.)

Disciple Merchant: "Hey, fool."

Assistant: "I'm not a fool, but what's up!"

Disciple Merchant: “We’re going to see the King. Together.”

Assistant: “Yes!”

Chapter 3, “It’s Decided. I Will Sing So the Swords Will Stop.”

——— **The Village of Wintering, in the Forest**

Clang! Cling!

The Hero: “...!”

Clink! Clang!

The Hero: “Agh!”

The Female Paladin: “...”

Clink! Clink!

The Hero: “Curse of Lightning! Falling Thunder! Oooooohhhh! Lightning Destruction!”

Clink! Clink!

The Hero: “Haah... Hahh...”

The Female Paladin: “Oi, Hero.”

The Hero: “Eh? Ah. Female Paladin.”

The Female Paladin: “You’re working too hard. You’re looking a bit pale, in fact.”

The Hero: “That’s not true. I’m rehabilitating.”

The Female Paladin: “...”

The Hero: “I need to work even harder.”

The Female Paladin: “Hero.”

The Hero: “Eh?”

The Female Paladin: “It’s alright, so come over here.”

The Hero: “It hurts. What’s this!”

The Female Paladin: “Training is forbidden from now on.”

The Hero: “You can’t just say that.”

The Female Paladin: “Watch me.”

The Hero: “What...”

The Female Paladin smiles.

The Hero: “But there’s nothing else worth doing.”

The Female Paladin: “Stop saying that.”

The Hero: “...”

The Female Paladin: “It’s not like you became the Hero solely because of your combat ability.”

The Hero: “I know. It’s because I received divine sanction from the Holy Spirit of Light, right?”

The Female Paladin: “That is not correct either.”

The Hero: “It isn’t?”

The Female Paladin: “Well... I don’t know either.”

Grass rustling.

——— The Village of Wintering, the Holy Order of the Lake, the Headquarters

The Hero: “It’s become huge.”

The Female Paladin: “We’ve had a few renovations done. I’m back!”

Female Chevalier: “Welcome back, Grandmaster, Hero.”

The Hero: “Thanks.”

The Female Paladin: “Is the bath ready?”

The Hero: “Owww. Let me go, my ear hurts.”

The Female Paladin: “No way.”

The Hero: “Aren’t you embarrassed by this?”

Female Chevalier: “Please proceed to the Crystal Gardens.”

The Female Paladin: “Thank you. Let’s go.”

The Hero: “Hey, hey, wait.”

The Female Paladin: “I can’t wait.”

Female Chevalier: “Victory and Valour, Grandmaster.”

——— The Village of Wintering, the Holy Order of the Lake, the Headquarters, the Crystal Gardens

Door opens.

The Hero: “Wow.”

The Female Paladin: “What?”

The Hero: “What a splendid bath.”

The Female Paladin: “It’s really a greenhouse, we use it to experiment on warm climate crops.”

The Hero: “I see. ”

The Female Paladin: “Is this your first time?”

The Hero: “Yes. I mean, I’ve heard of it.”

The Female Paladin: “It’s a real moneysucker though. I built this thing upon the instructions of the Demon King, , but its operational costs are getting ridiculous.”

The Hero: “I suppose that’s true.”

The Female Paladin: “Alright, here we are.”

The Hero: “Hmm?”

The Female Paladin: “It’s a bath. Part of the hot water that heats the room can also be used as a bath. You want to sweat it out, right?”

The Hero: “Yeah, thank you.”

The Female Paladin: “Undress.”

The Hero: “I will! Alone. So don’t come over! You pervert!”

The Female Paladin: “How rude. I never said we would get inside together.”

The Hero: “Then what do you want?”

The Female Paladin: “I’ll just wash your back.”

The Hero: “—!”

The Female Paladin: “It’s fine. Wear a towel over your waist.”

The Hero: “Even so!”

The Female Paladin: “Right, so undress.”

The Hero: “I got it, I’ll undress! Face that way.”

The Female Paladin: "Being straightforward sure is better."

The Hero: "I feel like I got defeated really easily."

The Female Paladin: "Are you done?"

The Hero: "Not yet."

The Female Paladin: "Mmmm."

The Hero: "..."

The Female Paladin: "Are you done?"

The Hero: "Yeah."

The Female Paladin: "Right. Sit here."

The Hero: "Like this?"

The Female Paladin: "I'm going to pour hot water on you now. If it's too hot just tell me."

The Hero: "Yeah."

The Female Paladin: "—"

Splash.

The Hero: "Ahhh, it's hot."

The Female Paladin: "Does it feel good?"

The Hero: "Yep!"

Splash.

The Female Paladin: "It's unfortunate we can't do this in the winter."

The Hero: "Why not? Surely this would be fantastic in the winter."

The Female Paladin: "If we tried doing this in the winter, with all the snow around, the water would freeze too quickly."

The Hero: "Yeah, that's true."

Splash.

The Female Paladin: "...You could stay here."

The Hero: "Sorry?"

The Female Paladin: "Nothing." *Scrub, scrub.*

The Hero: "What's that?"

The Female Paladin: "It's a soft brush. Made from pig bristles."

The Hero: "It feels great."

The Female Paladin: "Doesn't it? I love using it too."

The Hero: "I see."

Splash.

The Female Paladin: "—♪" *Scrub.*

The Hero: "You seem to have really good technique. Are you very experienced at this?"

The Female Paladin: "I suppose all knights are very experienced at brushing."

The Hero: "Is that so?"

The Female Paladin: "Is there anywhere that itches?"

The Hero: "Behind my ear."

The Female Paladin: "Alright."

The Hero: "Ooooooh."

The Female Paladin: "Even animals who can speak are easy to deal with in this manner."

The Hero: "What? I didn't understand what you just said."

The Female Paladin: "It's just an inside joke."

Splash.

The Hero: "Ohhhh."

The Female Paladin: "Did it get in your ear? I'm sorry."

The Hero: "It's okay."

The Female Paladin: "Now for your hands. Pass me your right hand."

The Hero: "Okay. Here you go."

The Female Paladin: "—♪"

The Hero: "Umm."

The Female Paladin: "What is it?"

The Hero: "Well, it's really nothing, but..."

The Female Paladin: "What a strange person."

The Hero: "...It's not strange."

The Female Paladin: “?”

The Hero: “It’s so ticklish!”

The Female Paladin: “You’re a man, right? Endure it.”

The Hero: “Even men have some things they can’t endure.”

The Female Paladin: “Just a bit more.”

The Hero: “Ooooooh.”

The Female Paladin: “You’re completely red.”

The Hero: “You’re fully clothed, so you don’t understand.”

The Female Paladin: “?”

The Hero: “It’s hot. Water.”

The Female Paladin: “Got it.”

Splash.

The Hero: “Ahhh...”

The Female Paladin: “Now for your left hand.”

The Hero: “Yeah.”

Brush brush.

The Female Paladin: “I think you work yourself too hard.”

The Hero: “...”

The Female Paladin: “I really want to help you, and you should know I like you. I’m the same as the Demon King, then.”

The Hero: “Ehh...”

The Female Paladin: “Why are you turning red?”

The Hero: “What a sudden thing to say...”

The Female Paladin: “Oh, right. This is my first time saying it straight to your face. But I like you. But that’s why I pledged my sword to you in the first place.”

The Hero: “...”

The Female Paladin: “It’s no use clamming up.”

The Hero: “Umm, I’m sorry.”

The Female Paladin: “No. It’s fine. I understand if it’ll take you some time.”

The Hero: "...?"

The Female Paladin: "You are really powerful. If we were to fight, I'd probably be crushed by you, right? But, because of that, I believe there are limits to how much better you can become by just training."

The Hero: "..."

The Female Paladin: "By limits, I mean that no matter how good you become at this aspect, it no longer contributes to you winning your opponent. You're already the strongest. However, you need to become stronger at liking yourself."

The Hero: "...I couldn't possibly just do that."

The Female Paladin: "Yes, you can."

The Hero: "..."

Splash.

The Female Paladin: "I believe you definitely can."

The Hero: "Really?"

The Female Paladin: "The Hero I travelled around with was a very kind person, but you're a much, much nicer person right now."

The Hero: "..."

The Female Paladin: "Despite all the troubles and all the pain you hold close to yourself, you've become great... But if only you could let go of them, you could become even better."

The Hero: "That would be nice."

The Female Paladin: "Alright, let's wash off."

Splash.

The Hero: "Is it over?"

The Female Paladin: "Nope. Get into the tub."

The Hero: "The tub?"

The Female Paladin: "It's this big wooden bucket. I'll pour hot water in it, and it'll go right up to your shoulders. This is quite like your samurai training, is it not?"

The Hero: "Indeed. Well, I suppose if it's for samurai training."

The Female Paladin: "By cooking your body, you can steel your spirit."

The Hero: "Spirit... That's exactly what I like."

The Female Paladin: “And don’t do that thing where you count to hundred and then jump out.”

——- **The Moors near the Plains of Scilla**

Stomp stomp stomp.

Mercenary Scout: “This is bad.”

Stomp stomp stomp.

Mercenary Archer: “What is it?”

Mercenary Scout: “The Crusaders are moving in our direction with a whole unit of those musket guys.”

Mercenary Archer: “How many?”

Mercenary Scout: “Their ranks are quite wide and I can’t be sure. But seeing as how one platoon has about 20-50 men, I would say there are quite a few of them. It looks like they’ve caught on to our attempt to escape with all the saltpetre.”

Mercenary Archer: “There aren’t any refugees that look like this, I suppose.”

Resourceful Young Man: “This is bad! Let’s run!”

Mercenary Survivor: “We can’t do that.”

Small Mercenary: “That’s right. We can’t run.”

Young Mercenary nods.

Resourceful Young Man: “Why not? The enemy has those fire spitting sticks! They’re going to kill us all!”

Mercenary Survivor: “We are no longer mercenaries.”

Small Mercenary: “Yeah.”

Resourceful Young Man: “What are you saying! You are mercenaries!”

Mercenary Survivor: “Based on the promises of our Chief, and the contract from that nobleman, we are now brave knights of the Kingdom of Winter and the Kingdom of White Night.”

Small Mercenary: “That’s right. And knights don’t run away.”

Resourceful Young Man: “What stupid things you say! Aren’t you going to run away?! That guy may be a nobleman, but he’s plenty quick on his feet too!”

Mercenary Survivor: “You’re not a knight, so go ahead and run away.”

Small Mercenary: "Indeed."

Young Mercenary: "They're still some distance away. You can make it if you run now."

Mercenary Archer: "How far away are they?"

Mercenary Scout: "We've probably got another day or two."

Resourceful Young Man: "Then..."

Mercenary Survivor: "So, what should we do?"

Small Mercenary: "..."

Young Mercenary: "Should we sally out and fight or should we stay and defend this fortress?"

Mercenary Archer: "We'll have to strike while the enemy is still disorganised."

Mercenary Survivor: "But judging by their numbers, this is not a strike we can effectively carry out."

Small Mercenary: "We'll think about it when the time comes, in the meantime, we just need to fight while singing our hearts out."

Resourceful Young Man: "Don't be stupid. This is just foolish. This will be your third consecutive fight. Are you all out of your minds?!"

Small Mercenary: "Don't call the Chief a fool."

Resourceful Young Man: "He is! He's a fool! To fight in such a place does nobody any good, you'll all just get slaughtered like dogs. That's very uncool for knights. So stop being such fools and let's get out of here, alright?"

Mercenary Survivor: "Knights don't run away."

Resourceful Young Man: "What exactly are you protecting? The Kingdom of White Night doesn't exist anymore. You're fighting without any real objectives!"

Young Mercenary: "..."

Mercenary Archer: "That's why I said, if we let the enemy seize what we've got, it'll be really troublesome!"

Mercenary Survivor: "That's right. There's a reason why the nobleman wanted this hidden away. This saltpetre has got something to do with the mystery of that fire spitting cylinder."

Resourceful Young Man: "Yes, it probably does, so..."

Mercenary Survivor: "That's why we can't let them have it."

Small Mercenary: "Exactly."

Young Mercenary: “We really have to fight.”

Rustling.

Mercenary Archer: “Who is it!”

Disciple Nobleman: “It’s me.”

Elder Sister Maid smiles.

Resourceful Young Man: “It’s you! You came back!... Who is this?”

Mercenary Survivor: “Nobleman!”

Disciple Nobleman: “That was my intention from the start. Sorry to have to meet you in such a place.”

Small Mercenary: “No, this is work after all.”

Young Mercenary nods.

Mercenary Archer: “We’re being chased by the Crusaders. They’ve clearly got their eyes on the stuff, but even with all the carriages, we’re going to have a hard time moving this stuff.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Even if we move, they’ll catch up to us from behind for sure.”

Resourceful Young Man: “That’s why I told you to run. Please, convince them to run away.”

Disciple Nobleman: “What do you think? Second Chief?”

Elder Sister Maid: “...”

Small Mercenary: “Second?”

Young Mercenary: “?”

Disciple Nobleman: “Yes, it would be really troublesome for this unit to operate without a leader. So after intensive searching, I present to you... your new Chief.”

Small Mercenary: “Eh? But... she’s a girl.”

Young Mercenary: “Is this some kind of joke.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes, it has been requested that I become your leader.”

Small Mercenary: “We have only one Chief.”

Mercenary Archer: “Even without the Chief, we can still go on.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I understand the situation. However, for the purposes of communication and representation with the Kingdom of Ice, you will require a certain personage. Think of myself as a figurehead, if you will.”

Disciple Nobleman: “So in the meantime, this girl is my recommendation. Please do not take offence by it.”

Elder Sister Maid: “...”

Small Mercenary: “We’ll leave you to it then.”

Young Mercenary: “...”

Mercenary Archer: “More importantly, what are we going to do about the upcoming fight?”

Resourceful Young Man: “Run away!”

Mercenary Survivor: “Why don’t we let our Chief decide that?”

Disciple Nobleman: “Why not?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Firstly, I have no intention of actually becoming your Chief. — You can just call me the Substitute. It is my hope that a proper Chief will be selected from within your ranks. Moreover, I am terrible at fighting. All I know are the basics of swinging a sword around, and I’ve never commanded anyone before.”

Mercenary Archer: “Then you’re completely useless.”

Mercenary Survivor: “What’s the point of having her as a commander?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Because I am a civilian... I believe that you knights will protect the people here.”

Small Mercenary: “Eh?”

Young Mercenary: “...”

Elder Sister Maid: “Secondly, I will be able to offer you my expertise in areas other than fighting. And I will require your protection to achieve that. There is a place I need to go, and for that, I must be protected.”

Small Mercenary: “I don’t get it.”

Young Mercenary: “...”

Mercenary Archer: “Is your head alright, nobleman?”

Disciple Nobleman: “Yes. I guarantee it. Since this person is like a sister to me, I personally guarantee that she is good. She may have some strange ideas, but if you see them through to their fruition, we will be able to achieve something spectacular. That is the result of those who are taught by our teacher. Please take care of her.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Please.”

Small Mercenary: “Even if you were to say such a thing...”

Mercenary Archer: “So just tell us, do we fight or do we run? If you want to run, we will never recognise you.”

Resourceful Young Man: “If you don’t run you will die!”

Elder Sister Maid: “Why are those the only options?”

Mercenary Archer: “...Huh?”

Elder Sister Maid: “We could run while fighting. Or we could not run, but still not fight. You need to open up your imagination a bit.”

Young Mercenary: “Hmm?”

Mercenary Archer: “What are you saying?”

Elder Sister Maid: “We’ve got a lot more options than just running or fighting.”

———— The Human World, the Polar Continent, a Frozen Wasteland

Scout of Light: “There are no people within sight.”

Soldier of Light: “We can’t see very far anyway. It’s too white, so our eyes hurt too.”

Musketeer of Light: “That’s right. We’ll have to leave it to you.”

Marine of Light: “Heh. That’s fine too, I suppose.”

Scout of the Light: “It’s a lot less cold and less snowy than I expected.”

Soldier of Light: “It’s just that the ground below us is frozen.”

Musketeer of Light: “Do we continue advancing into this frozen land?”

Marine of Light: “Of course.”

Scout of Light: “It goes up to 150km even.”

Musketeer of Light: “However, it seems like the road used by merchants is close to here.”

Marine of Light: “It’s a priority to find it.”

Scout of Light: “What do we do if we come across any merchants?”

Soldier of Light: “We’re here on a secret military mission. They can’t be allowed to know about us.”

Musketeer of Light: “Man, it’s been a really long time since I last had a hot bowl of meat soup.”

—— **The Kingdom of Mist, the Capital City, a Deserted Market**

Wind blows...

Coughing Boy: “Sir... Sir... Spare a slice of bread for a poor boy...”

Thin Citizen: “...”

Coughing Boy: “Sir... Sir... Ahem. Ahem. Please... I haven’t eaten in four days...”

Middle Aged Woman: “My my! You’re covered in boils. Don’t come any closer!”

Coughing Boy: “Ahem, ahem. Please... Please...”

Wind blows...

Thin Citizen: “How about five new silver pieces?”

Travelling Merchant: “That will get you half a sack, sir.”

Thin Citizen: “What’s with this price! I’ve got six children to feed, you know.”

Travelling Merchant: “I’ve also got children of my own I need to feed.”

Wind blows...

Sundry Merchant: “Come! Come! I’ve got all kinds of beans, from mung beans to peas! Come get your beans!”

Middle Aged Woman: “How much is one sack of peas?”

Sundry Merchant: “Three silver pieces.”

Middle Aged Woman: “That’s really expensive.”

Sundry Merchant: “In times like this, everything is expensive. I’ve got no choice. Are you buying?”

Middle Aged Woman: “Ah... One sack then. Give me the nicest ones, please. It’s to help some sick people recuperate.”

Sundry Merchant: “Ehh.”

Middle Aged Woman: “How troublesome. Oh, it’s already evening.”

Sundry Merchant: “Yeah.”

Middle Aged Woman: “Why aren’t the churchbells ringing?”

Sundry Merchant: “Don’t you know?”

Middle Aged Woman: “What about?”

Thin Citizen: “Oh, you’re talking about the churchbells?”

Sundry Merchant: “The churchbells have been melted down for copper.”

Middle Aged Woman: “Melted down?”

Sundry Merchant: “Yeah, by the Church. It is the will of the Holy Spirit; at times like this, every single weapon counts, and the copper gained from those churchbells will be used to kill some Demons.”

Middle Aged Woman: “Demons... I haven’t even seen them before.”

Thin Citizen: “It’s been so long since I’ve eaten my fill, I hope the Spirit can bestow such blessings upon us again.”

— The Kingdom of Copper, a Farm

Thin Old Man: “...”

Starving Serf: “I’m hungry...”

Female Serf: “Why can’t we eat barley and wheat even in the autumn?”

Supervisor: “They’ve been dispatched to the soldiers at the front.”

Thin Old Man: “There aren’t any soldiers in this village.”

Starving Serf: “Then how are we supposed to get the energy to plant wheat in the summer?”

Female Serf: “If we don’t, we’ll starve in the spring.”

Supervisor: “Alright, get to work.”

Thin Old Man: “Heh...”

Starving Serf: “I’ve got no energy.”

Female Serf: “Yeah... We’re way too depressed.”

Supervisor: “Hmm?”

Female Serf: “*Cremation** ash.”

Supervisor: “Yeah. They’re burning down the hut to the South. There’s a family there who’s caught the boils.”

Thin Old Man: “Smallpox...”

Starving Serf: “How scary.”

Female Serf: “Let’s leave this topic. We never know when we might suddenly catch it as well.”

Supervisor: "It's true. My son caught it too."

Starving Serf: "Speaking of which, there's nothing to do except wait until the whole village gets wiped out."

One-Handed Serf: "No, that's not exactly true."

Starving Serf: "Eh?"

One-Handed Serf: "Before I lost my arm, I spent quite a lot of my time travelling. In my travels, I've heard that the Kingdom of Reeds has a medicine for the boils."

Female Serf: "Medicine?... So it's curable?! The boils?!"

Supervisor: "Really? I've never heard anything like this before!"

One-Handed Serf: "If this information were to spread, all the serfs would run away. But it's true. Well, it's not so much an herb or anything, and it doesn't actually cure it. Moreover, people who have contracted smallpox are being taken care of by the people of the Holy Order."

Thin Old Man: "Medicine..."

Starving Serf: "The Holy Order looks after them? For real?!"

One-Handed Serf: "For people like us with no families, no one will even look for us until we die."

Female Serf: "..."

Supervisor: "The Kingdom of Reeds? That's very far. Why don't they share their medicine with us?"

Starving Serf: "It's medicine. What does it have to do with soldiers or trade or whatever, why do the noblemen not help us?"

Thin Old Man: "...How true... Sigh. How pitiful we are, oh merciful Spirit..."

Explanation

Cremation: In Buddhist tradition, both burial and cremation are permissible. In fact, Buddha himself was cremated. In the Christian faith, it has been forbidden to cremate bodies, only to bury them, until recently. The Holy Church of Light cremates its dead.

----- **Somewhere in the Holy Empire, a Secret Metalworks**

Clang! Clang!

Labourer: "Agh! Agh!"

Floor Supervisor: "What's wrong! The stove is slowing down! Bring more charcoal over!"

Clang! Clang!

Floor Supervisor: "Get the fire going!"

Clang! Clang!

Master Craftsman: "What is it?"

Craftsman: "No, we've reached the limit of our charcoal stocks..."

Master Craftsman: "What? Where are the accounts!"

Accounting Officer: "Guild Master, here I am."

Master Craftsman: "We don't have enough charcoal!"

Accounting Officer: "Well, we got as much charcoal as the permit allowed."

Master Craftsman: "Really?"

Craftsman: "At the pace we're consuming, we've cleared our entire stockpile."

Experienced Craftsman: "To begin with, stockpiling charcoal requires more space than stockpiling ores, so at full production, we only have enough for about a week."

Accounting Officer: "I see. Ahh, it's hot."

Master Craftsman: "Then we'll need to find new merchants."

Accounting Officer: "That's going to be a bit challenging."

Master Craftsman: "Hmm?"

Accounting Officer: "Following several days of competitive charcoal buying, the price has gone up immensely. It is presently three times the price than it was last week. In addition, our stocks were bought in summer, but we're halfway through autumn right now. Every village throughout the continent is trying to stockpile charcoal so they can tide through the rough winter, so it won't be an easy matter to get any more..."

Master Craftsman: "But that means we won't be able to meet the production quota for muskets and gunpowder set by his Royal Highness. Ummm. That's right! What about the strategy we were talking about before? Have we managed to get coke from the coal?"

Experienced Craftsman: "Didn't you tell us to reject all that? You said it would affect our relationship with the Forestry Guild."

Master Craftsman: "But right now, circumstances have changed. We can't continue with just charcoal. It's a new method we can't rely on, but it's worth a try."

Experienced Craftsman: “In that case, we can give it a shot... I hear we now need extensive permits for the Kingdom of Dunes and the Kingdom of Cliffs to obtain coal from their mines.”

Master Craftsman: “What do you mean?”

Experienced Craftsman: “The merchants have been pushing up the prices aggressively, I hear.”

Master Craftsman: “Why! But before that, why didn’t we stop them!”

Experienced Craftsman: “Don’t you remember? You made the decision to stop pursuing the coal matter. We don’t buy anything, but we still have to pay for it, why would we maintain such an expensive contract?”

Accounting Officer: “Well, well.”

Craftsman: “In that case, we have no choice but to buy charcoal. How about those countries with rich stockpiles? We represent his Royal Highness the Crown Prince Marshal after all. Surely that’ll be enough to make the noblemen and feudal lords give up their charcoal.”

Accounting Officer: “That might actually work out.”

Master Craftsman: “Alright! Then I’ll write a letter right away. Accounting Officer, we’ll need you to negotiate with them. Form a consortium and request for charcoal from the neighbouring countries.”

Craftsman: “Yeah, we’ve had great results from the Kingdom of Elm with regards to their forestry.”

Experienced Craftsman: “We can definitely make good steel with the charcoal from the Kingdom of Elm!”

Accounting Officer: “I’ll see what we can do.”

Walks off.

Master Craftsman: “How about the flintlocks?”

Experienced Craftsman: “The craftsmanship involved in making one of those is much, much higher; at present we can only manage 50 pieces a month on our production line.”

Master Craftsman: “Right, let’s get this month’s production to the docks for shipping!”

———— The Demon World, the Borders, Silver Sand River

Flash!

The Demon King: “Alright, here we are.”

The Chief Maid: “Yes, your Majesty.”

The Hero: “Is this the correct place?”

The Demon King: “Yep, it’s exactly it. It’s not far from here.”

The Chief Maid: “You can return now, Hero.”

The Hero: “Really?”

The Demon King: “I’m sorry. It’s something of a secret, after all.”

The Hero: “The Library, right?”

The Chief Maid: “Yes.”

The Demon King: “Entry to the repository of our Tribe is forbidden to people from our Tribes.”

The Chief Maid: “Well, is this alright? I suppose it’s good for you to accumulate experience by entering the room of a young maiden.”

The Hero: “Is it such a wonderful place?”

The Demon King: “Ah—It’s nothing really.”

The Chief Maid: “It’s just filled with books.”

The Hero: “Really.”

The Demon King: “We won’t be able to communicate inside, so I’ll set an appropriate rendezvous.”

The Hero: “Appropriate?”

The Demon King: “I fear I may have to spend three days in there for research. I predict my researching skills are enough to achieve this.”

The Hero: “Hmm.”

The Demon King: “If I finish early, then I’ll spend some time walking around this area, so just look around for me. If I’m not here on the third day, come back on the fifth day.”

The Chief Maid: “That’s good.”

The Hero: “Understood. What are you researching?”

The Demon King: “Metallurgy and engineering. Right now we’re tied up in production issues.”

The Hero: “So there are things even you don’t know about?”

The Demon King: “Many, many things. This isn’t my field of speciality. I can’t bring the books with me, so it’s not like I have the information everywhere I go. To shape the

metal to such precise specifications will surely require a higher level of technology than we have now...”

The Hero: “Is that alright?”

The Demon King: “The situation is as such. We won’t be able to control the spread of technology once we release it, and the world is not exactly ready for the sort of impact this may have. I suppose it’s best that we don’t spread the technology. To begin with, the next crucial advancement in nuts and bolts has not even begun.”

The Hero: “I have no idea what you’re saying, but I’ll leave it to you.”

The Demon King: “Take care of things while I’m gone.”

The Hero: “Got it!”

The Chief Maid: “Then let’s go, your Majesty.”

The Hero: “Got it! Chief Maid, you too!”

The Demon King: “Bye bye.”

Flash!

——— The Holy Crusaders, Reserve Camp

Strum ♪ Strum ♪

Disciple Bard: “White hawthorn, roses singing in the wild.

Violets which sparkle in the dead of the night — ♪

Flowers, which bloom as summer pays a visit.

With the sweet blue of anise.

The ancient king listens and learns — ♪

Under the light of the moon, the moths are singing.

In the forest of spirits

Your voice opens the doors of magic.

Lonely is the chest

That with sweet warm blood wilts — ♪ “

Auxiliary of Light: “What a nice song.”

Spearman of Light: “It was somehow pleasing, yet sad at the same time.”

Strum ♪ Strum ♪

Disciple Bard: "It's a song from my hometown."

Auxiliary of Light: "Is that so?"

Spearman of Light: "That was very nice, Miss Bard."

Disciple Bard: "Yes?"

Spearman of Light: "If we just continue at this rate, we'll cross the massive hole and be on our way to the Demon World. It sure would be heartwarming if you could come along with us, Miss Bard..."

Disciple Bard: "Well, if I can lighten the burden of war."

Auxiliary of Light: "..."

Spearman of Light: "If you come with us, you'll probably get caught by the commanders though."

Disciple Bard: "I'll just run away then."

Spearman of Light: "Don't say such things!"

Auxiliary of Light: "That's right. It's not something you should take lightly."

Disciple Bard: "I have no intention to play around."

Auxiliary of Light: "Why..."

Disciple Bard: "I am completely serious about singing."

Auxiliary of Light: "..."

Disciple Bard: "You guys train to swing your hundreds of swords, I sing to stop these hundreds of swords."

Auxiliary of Light: "That's..."

Disciple Bard: "It's decided."

Strum ♪ Strum ♪

Spearman of Light: "Miss Bard."

Disciple Bard: "It's decided. Just like how I came here on my two feet, I will return home singing."

——— **The Village of Wintering, the Kitchen**

The Hero: "Tadaa!"

The Hero: “Now it’s Hero cooking time! Without the Demon King, I’m all alone! Everybody! Applause!”

Silence.

The Hero: “First! Slice bread.”

Slice, slice.

The Hero: “It’s a bit lopsided, but that’s fine too.”

The Hero: “Now add cheese, sprinkle some salt, and sandwich it in between!”

The Hero: “Cheese bread is ready! It’s so easy!”

Flop.

The Hero: “...It’s a bit squishy.”

Squish.

The Hero: “It’s salty, but that’s fine! What’s the next recipe! That Chief Maid didn’t teach me enough?!”

The Female Paladin: “Well, would you like an honest review?”

The Hero: “Eh?! How long have you been here?!”

The Female Paladin: “Since you said that it was so easy.”

The Hero: “...It failed.”

The Female Paladin: “Alright.” *Holds hand.*

The Hero: “...Uhh.”

The Female Paladin: “Did I surprise you?... Well, I suppose I shouldn’t touch you so suddenly. That’s to be expected.”

The Hero: “You’ve been acting strange for quite some time.”

The Female Paladin: “That’s not true, I’m very normal.”

The Hero: “That calmness is most strange.”

The Female Paladin: “I brought this with me, so should I make it?”

The Hero: “...Yeah.”

The Female Paladin: “It’s meat stew with bacon and cabbages.”

The Hero: “Ohh!”

The Female Paladin: “Is there still a fire going?”

The Hero: “No... The Chief Maid told me not to start any fires.”

The Female Paladin: “Are you a kid!”

The Hero: “No, I’ve been trying my best! My very best! Dammit!”

The Female Paladin: “You really act like a kid sometimes.”

The Hero: “I want to eat some hot food.”

The Female Paladin: “Well... Make me a small flame on your hand.”

The Hero: “Spell of Flame!”

The Female Paladin: “Now hold this flask and hang on for a bit.”

Whistling—

The Hero: “Wow, what a great smell!”

The Female Paladin: “Because I’m boiling it with red wine. I’m not as good as the Little Maid Sister, but it’s probably not that bad, right?”

The Hero: “No, no. Thank you so much.”

The Female Paladin: “It’s done. Shall we eat?”

Clunk.

The Hero: “Ohhh!” *Slurp, slurp.*

The Female Paladin: “...”

The Hero: “You’re not eating?”

The Female Paladin: “I ate in the Headquarters already.”

The Hero: “Really... This is good.”

The Female Paladin: “Are you happy with it?”

The Hero: “I am.”

The Female Paladin: (I see... So a girl in the world still needs to rely on her cooking to get the guy’s heart... I seem to have forgotten to simple things the last time.)

The Hero: “...I’m full.”

The Female Paladin: “You sure ate a lot.”

The Hero: “They didn’t leave me anything to start a fire with, huh.”

The Female Paladin: “You’ve got fire magic for that, so don’t worry.”

The Hero: “Yeah, I guess so.”

The Female Paladin: "Here, I'll write you the recipe."

The Hero: "Eh?"

The Female Paladin: "The Chief Maid left you some food and recipes, didn't she?"

The Hero: "Yeah."

The Female Paladin: "I guess I'll prepare them for you while they're gone."

The Hero: "Is that alright?"

The Female Paladin: "Don't hesitate right now."

The Hero: "Okay. Here they are."

The Female Paladin: "...Bread and water. Cheese sandwich and water. Cabbage, bread and water. Sliced ham, bread and water. Buy more bread. Bread, ham and water. Cheese sandwich and water..."

The Hero: "..."

The Female Paladin: "...This is worse than a Paladin's combat rations."

The Hero sobs.

The Female Paladin: "Don't cry, Hero?!"

The Hero: "It's tragic, isn't it? Isn't it?!"

The Female Paladin: "You could call it tragic... It's completely just bread and water."

The Hero: "It's their plan to bully me."

The Female Paladin: "Is that so?"

The Hero: "If I'm looking after the place, I should just have all my meals at an inn, right!"

The Female Paladin: "Well, that's true, I suppose..."

The Hero: "I'm sure the Chief Maid still bears a grudge against me continuously having dinner with the Demon King at the inn that last time."

The Female Paladin: "Really?"

The Hero: "Definitely."

The Female Paladin: "I see..."

The Hero: "That's why, please make some things for me."

The Female Paladin: "Well, that's alright, but please don't expect my culinary skills to be anything wonderful."

The Hero: "Oh! Anything is fine as long as it's not a cheese sandwich..."

The Female Paladin: (He must be really lonely...)

The Hero: "All done!"

The Female Paladin: "Alright, take a break and then we can do some sword practice."

The Hero: "Eh?"

The Female Paladin: "It's your payment for the food. Or are you afraid of some exercise?"

The Hero: "I really don't mind."

The Female Paladin: "We can go brush the horses after that too."

——— **The Village of Wintering, the Demon King's Manor, the Hero's Room**

Door opens.

The Hero: "Ahhh."

Throws things around.

The Hero: "Nope, not this... Where did I put it?"

Shing.

The Hero: "Blades and armour are really troublesome to prepare."

Clang! Clang!

"Hey!"

The Hero: "Oh, it's the Female Paladin. Over here! What is it?"

Door opens.

The Female Paladin: "...What are you doing?"

The Hero: "I'm preparing equipment."

The Female Paladin: "Equipping? What are you looking for then?"

The Hero: "I've looked everywhere, but I can't seem to find my Ring of Prayer and my Elvish Tonic Herbs."

The Female Paladin: "Hmm..."

The Hero: "Well, more importantly, is the food ready?"

The Female Paladin: "That's all you think about."

The Hero: "Oh no, I'm not uncivilised."

The Female Paladin: "Really?"

The Hero: "Really."

The Female Paladin: "At any rate, it'll be fully prepared in two hours... Oh, I've come for some brushing, so you can sit over there."

The Hero: "Hmm?"

The Female Paladin: "What is it? No need to be alarmed. Is this brush too painful?"

The Hero: "Somehow."

The Female Paladin: "What is it?"

The Hero: "Somehow I feel like I'm no longer being treated as a human."

The Female Paladin: "It's all in your mind."

The Hero: "Really?"

The Female Paladin: "Really."

The Hero: "..."

The Female Paladin: "..."

The Hero: "I guess so, then."

The Female Paladin: (Master sure is accurate!)

The Hero: "Alright."

The Female Paladin: "Close your eyes, and I'll manage your hair."

The Hero: "Shouldn't it be the other way round?"

The Female Paladin: "I can handle the maintenance of my own hair. It's a source of pride for me after all."

The Hero: "You've always been proud of it all this while."

The Female Paladin: "You didn't even look at it back then, though."

The Hero: "...Really?"

The Female Paladin: "Mmm..."

Brush, brush.

The Hero: "..."

The Female Paladin: "Why are you closing your eyes so tightly?"

The Hero: "Because you're around."

The Female Paladin: "Relax more."

The Hero: "Hehe."

The Female Paladin: "Don't be so effeminate."

The Hero: "Don't make fun of me!"

The Female Paladin: "Just close your eyes normally."

The Hero: "Really."

The Female Paladin: "When you're acting normal I think you're quite cool."

The Hero: "Eh, what? What are you saying!"

The Female Paladin: "I correct myself. You're always cool."

The Hero: "..."

Brush, brush.

Kiss.

The Hero: "?!"

The Female Paladin: "What?"

The Hero: "What did you just do?!"

The Female Paladin: "What... skinship."

The Hero: "This is too weird."

The Female Paladin: "No, it's normal. — Is it unpleasant?"

The Hero: "Uhh, well, no, but..."

The Female Paladin: "Then, it's fine."

The Hero: "No, it's not! Please be more modest and think this through."

The Female Paladin: "I'll never come out on top like that."

The Hero: "Why are you so forceful?"

The Female Paladin: "Hero!"

The Hero: "Y-yes!"

The Female Paladin: "With regards to this incident, it's true that you should be cautious about the modesty displayed by a young maiden, but with the prevalence of mixed

signals and wrong messages, it is preferable to avoid confusion. As a result, it is best to be straightforward!”

The Hero: “Y-yeah!” (I’m being dominated!)

The Female Paladin: “Until the Demon King gets back, I want to share a pillow with you.”

The Hero is shocked.

The Female Paladin: “It’s fine. Don’t worry. It may be my first time, but I need to practice doing battle with the Demon King.”

The Hero: (What?!)

The Female Paladin: “I need to show her my burning spirit.”

The Hero: (Now they’re doing battle!)

The Female Paladin: “Now I am on the offensive and the Demon King is on the defence.”

The Hero: (What do you intend to do?)

The Female Paladin: “I want to take a large ship.”

The Hero: “I’m really worried about this!!”

The Female Paladin: “How troublesome.”

The Hero: “I don’t understand your reasoning.”

The Female Paladin: “Mmm, it’s not a joke. At night, we’ll chat about everyday things and then retire to the same pillow. — We’re both of the age to understand what that means, right?”

The Hero: “...Ahh. Yeah.”

The Female Paladin: “Your face is all red.”

The Hero: “Don’t say unnecessary things.”

The Female Paladin: “That’s why, if you don’t want to, it’s only good manners to reject me politely.”

The Hero: “It’s not that.”

The Female Paladin: “Then it’s fine.”

The Hero: “—Is it really?”

The Female Paladin: “It is.”

The Hero: “What’s this?”

The Female Paladin: “No, it’s the first stage of my attack.”

The Hero: “Umm, well, umm...”

The Female Paladin: “Please don’t make unnecessary comments.”

The Hero: “Why me?”

The Female Paladin: “So I guess you don’t want it?”

The Hero: “Eh...?”

The Female Paladin: “I’m about to blast fire from my face. You’re so fickle minded.”

The Hero: “H-hey.”

The Female Paladin: “The Demon King surely understands this as well.”

The Hero: “Is that so?”

The Female Paladin nods.

The Hero: “You look very indignant.”

The Female Paladin: “It’s an unpleasant quip.”

The Hero: “...”

The Female Paladin: “No matter what, it’s a no-go? Well... I don’t want to say this, but, next time will definitely be a big fight, it’ll be a massive battle. One which I have no intention to lose, but... but...”

The Hero: “No... Yeah, I understand.”

The Female Paladin: “Is that alright?”

The Hero: “I understand. Completely. I have been awakened!”

The Female Paladin: “That’s my Hero!” *Smiles.*

Chapter 4, “Having Come to Such a Time, Hesitation is Forbidden.”

———— Near the Plains of Scilla, in the Forest, Camouflaged Knights Brigade

Mercenary Survivor: “The torch lights are drawing closer. They must think we are still at the fortifications. Distance is four and a half miles.”

Small Mercenary: “We can still draw them in closer.”

Elder Sister Maid: “No, it’s not necessary. Please prepare the fire arrows.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Is that really alright? We can take them all down at one go.”

Disciple Nobleman: “.....”

Elder Sister Maid: “I believe that option will lead to high casualties, it’s a very harsh option as well. If you think about it, it doesn’t fulfil our objectives either..... Moreover, the risk involved is quite high. If we attack them, we might only be able to take down 500 or maybe 1,000 of them.”

Mercenary Survivor: “.....”

Elder Sister Maid: “I’m counting on you.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Alright, let’s do it. Archers!”

Rustling

Mercenary Archer: “Is this alright?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Sulphur, saltpetre and charcoal. Yes.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Is sulphur and charcoal really okay?”

Elder Sister Maid: “According to my Mistress, the real stuff requires a composition of 50-70% saltpetre, but we don’t actually require that sort of explosive power. To put it extremely, everything will be fine as long as we can exhaust the saltpetre, which is the source of all the trouble.”

Small Mercenary: “But, how slow. Is it burning yet?”

Young Mercenary: “It’s burning, isn’t it?”

Mercenary Archer: “I can confirm that the oil and straw is burning.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Something’s off. I clearly remember the enemy weapons making a tremendous noise.”

Elder Sister Maid: "I think it will."

Resourceful Young Man: "Eh?"

Elder Sister Maid: "I think it will. Let's leave quickly."

Mercenary Survivor: "I suddenly really want to hear this tremendous noise which you've been talking about."

Small Mercenary: "Nah, we should go. We're about to run into the Holy Crusaders from the Central Continent. With our numbers, we'll get discovered really quickly if we don't leave."

Young Mercenary NODS

Mercenary Archer: "That's true."

Resourceful Young Man: "Cheh."

Disciple Nobleman: "Seems like it's about time."

Elder Sister Maid: "Yep." *Nod*

Mercenary Survivor: "?"

BOOM!!!

Small Mercenary: "!"

Young Mercenary: "!"

Mercenary Archer: "!?"

Resourceful Young Man: "Wh, wh, what the hell!?"

Disciple Nobleman: "Oww. My ears hurt."

Elder Sister Maid: "Yep."

Resourceful Young Man: "What was that! That really surprised the hell out of me!"

Disciple Nobleman: "What a noisy young man."

Mercenary Survivor: "There's no need to be that surprised."

Small Mercenary: "I can't hear a thing."

Elder Sister Maid: "Will you recognise me now?"

Boom.....! Bang!

Mercenary Survivor: "....."

Elder Sister Maid: “Will you recognise me as a substitute? There’s a place I have to go with my own two feet. In order to get there, there’s a lot of dangers which we will have to overcome.”

Mercenary Survivor: “.....”

Small Mercenary: “..... Yeah.”

Young Mercenary: “I will recognise you.”

Mercenary Archer: “There’s nothing for it.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Hey, hey.”

Mercenary Survivor: “I’m sure you can see the consensus is that we cannot reject such a treasure as a leader like you. In that case, we’ve got no choice. Please continue doing some more good work like you just did.”

Elder Sister Maid: “In that case.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Yeah.”

Small Mercenary: “We’ve got no choice. Alright, let’s go strip those Light bastards of their equipment. Then we’ll infiltrate the Kingdom of White Night. Isn’t that right, Substitute?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yeah. We’ll gather information, and then..... we’ll snatch some ships.” *Smile*

——— **The City of the Gate, Consulate of the Merchant’s Union**

Disciple Engineer: “Whoaaaaa!”

Creak

Disciple Engineer: “That’s not it. More, over here! Hey! Come over! Hey, hey! That’s more like it!!”

Bam

Fire Dragon Lady: “..... You, what are you doing?”

Disciple Engineer: “I can’t let my teacher see such a sloppy lay out. No way.”

Bam!!

Disciple Engineer: “!?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Look here, this is the study of the Union. Just who are you?”

Knock knock

Shrewd Accountant: “Ah, Disciple Engineer.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Disciple Engineer?”

Disciple Engineer: “Yeah, I’m sorry. Pleased to meet you, I’m the Disciple Engineer.”

Shrewd Accountant: “This here is the Fire Dragon Lady. She manages the Consulate, and she’s a Lady of the Fire Dragon Tribe. On top of that, she also holds an important position in the Self-Governing Council of the City of the Gate.”

Disciple Engineer: “F, F, Fire Dragon Tribe!?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “What’s up with that?”

Shrewd Accountant: “?”

Disciple Engineer: “You mean the elite among the Dragon Tribe of the Eight Great Tribes..... And on top of that, the purest blood lineage. How terrifying. Whoa.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “It’s quite tragic for you to say such a thing.”

Shrewd Accountant: “Eh?”

Disciple Engineer: “Huh?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “I am already a citizen of the City of the Gate. It doesn’t matter what Tribe we came from, we all work together to govern the City as its Self-Governing Council.”

Shrewd Accountant: “..... Madam.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “What is it?”

Disciple Engineer: “This is a map of the City.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Map.....”

Shrewd Accountant: “The Disciple Engineer is an expert on all matters related to construction. Remember the contract orchestrated by the Middle Aged Merchant to build a bridge across the Great Portal? He was the conducting engineer.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “My, my! Thank you for all your good work!” *Bows*

Disciple Engineer: “Eh. Ah. W, well. Please raise your head.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “No, it is because of that bridge that we are able to enjoy the prosperity brought about by the salt trade.”

Shrewd Accountant: “Indeed.”

Disciple Engineer: “Ahh.”

Shrewd Accountant: “——? Why have you turned completely red?”

Disciple Engineer: “That’s umm..... The Engineering world is almost completely male, and umm, I’m a Banshee with horns, so..... it’s just the Lady is really beautiful.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Hohohohoho, that makes me very happy.”

Shrewd Accountant: (The Fire Dragon Lady seems to be very popular these days.....)

Disciple Engineer: “In any case, I was invited by the Middle Aged Merchant to draw up plans for the renovation of this house. I apologise for the intrusion.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “And you’ve also been working on the plans of the city? This is..... a market?”

Shrewd Accountant: “Mmm.”

Disciple Engineer: “Yeah, that’s right. The Central Wholesale Market. In this city, a large thoroughfare links the Southern Gate directly with the Northern Gate, a large number of caravans pass through the road, and surrounding areas are filled with warehouses. These warehouses form a business district. In the middle of all of that runs the river, the confluence of which forms the first merchant’s quarter.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Mmm, I walk through the area every day.”

Disciple Engineer: “City planning concerns the placement of facilities and the connection of these infrastructure.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Don’t these developments just happen as the city grows?”

Disciple Engineer: “Of course, there are many cities for which such developments occur passively. Rather, you could say that’s the natural state of things. But, well, in cities like this, where we have a specific objective for the development, then we have to come up with a design and a plan for better long-term results.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “?”

Shrewd Accountant: “What do you mean?”

Disciple Engineer: “For example, this Third Business District sits on the river bank and has dense concentrations of warehouses; it’s also close to the residential district and the Western Temple, so it’s very popular, but.....”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Yeah.”

Disciple Engineer: “The residential area has been growing towards this direction, and at this point, there isn’t any more room for it to grow. In other words, growth is not an objective. We can try to organise the area as it is better, but this cannot be a long-term solution. For that, we should have set aside a larger area for the market, such that the residential area can be allowed to grow further to the South.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Indeed.”

Disciple Engineer: “And with the Municipal Halls of the Self Governing Council.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “What do the halls have to do with it?”

Disciple Engineer: “These aren’t really halls, they’re actually the location of the Defence High Command.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Defence High Command.....?”

Disciple Engineer: “Well, of course it’s fine to use them as Municipal Halls, but this city was originally a fortress, right? In that case, it would be natural for the municipal halls to become the command base. But, right now, with the influx of refugees, there has been haphazard development, with important roads becoming closed, the lines have become muddled up.”

Shrewd Accountant: “W, wait a minute. What are these lines?”

Disciple Engineer: “They’re lines of human movement. They include roads, but they essentially comprise any routes a person with an objective can take. For example, this is the line from the Municipal Halls to the Southern Gate.....? It’s quite a long, deviated path. That’s because of the expansion of the First Market.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “I can see that.”

Disciple Engineer: “I talked it over with the Middle Aged Merchant..... We were thinking of rebuilding the city walls, but we don’t have money and the interior is in chaos.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Do you have any complaints about this city?”

Disciple Engineer: “No, no. That’s not what I meant. Well, it’s not, but a city is basically one..... advanced organisation.”

Shrewd Accountant: “?”

Disciple Engineer: “In other words, where humans are doing things, they will search for ways to do these things easier and more conveniently. However, what people do is dependent on their surroundings. If commerce is convenient, then as they start engaging in sales, if imports and exports are also convenient then trade will become prosperous. People go where they want to go, right? And so they will go to where their profession is most convenient, hence city planning is ultimately about what to do in future..... This is why even though engineers are known as the Kings of Technique..... Umm. Hey, are you listening?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “I’m listening, please go on.”

Disciple Engineer: “The City of the Gate is basically a trading city dependent on the confluence of the shipping routes of the large river and the roads. After that, in order to protect the trade and trading point, it developed a secondary purpose as a fortress city. At present, having acquired independence, it is serving another purpose as a city-state.

To balance all these three purposes is by no means an easy feat. Repairing the city walls alone is already very difficult, not to mention expensive.”

Fire Dragon Lady nods

Disciple Engineer: “Personally, I would hope for the Southern wall to be constructed along this line.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “For what reasons?”

Disciple Engineer: “Firstly, it serves the purpose of protecting the temple. Secondly, it serves as preparation against excess population.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Interesting.”

Disciple Engineer: “Really?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “You’ve said some very interesting things.”

Disciple Engineer: “For me, these are very troublesome things, though.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “You mean funding?”

Shrewd Accountant: “Exactly. These are massive projects. There doesn’t seem to be a wallet capable of paying for it.”

Disciple Engineer: “These are just empty blueprints.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Since nobody’s wallet is capable of paying for it, then how about we pay with a method apart from wallets?”

——— **The Country of White Night, the Port**

Elder Maid Sister: “It sure feels like they’ve let their guard down. They don’t even have any security here, with this many soldiers, do they really expect that no one will ever come here?”

Mercenary Survivor: “No matter how you put it, they’re still farmers. They only know how to live their lives of work and sleep. The fear of the enemy hasn’t been put into their bones yet.”

Small Mercenary: “Yeah!”

Trudge, trudge, trudge.....

“Ahhhh. Let’s hurry back to the dormitories to sleep.”

“Don’t whine. I’ve brought wine.”

“That’s nice, it’ll warm us up.”

..... Trudge, trudge, trudge

Young Mercenary: “.....Seems like they’re gone.”

Mercenary Archer: “Alright.”

Disciple Nobleman: “My heart was beating really fast back there.”

Elder Maid Sister: “Yeah, mine has been beating fast since I left the Grand Cathedral in the Holy Empire.”

Mercenary Survivor: “..... Just what sort of experiences have you had?”

Disciple Nobleman: “More than experiences, I’m sure she’s survived all kinds of dangerous encounters.”

Elder Maid Sister: “No such thing.”

Mercenary Survivor: “So, what should we do?”

Elder Maid Sister: “Right. As arranged, the Disciple Nobleman will command an 80-man squad to take over a ship. If possible, it would be best if the hold was stocked with food. We don’t have the skills required to modify ships, so we should pick a suitable ship capable of carrying all of us.”

Disciple Nobleman: “What a skilled delegator.”

Elder Maid Sister: “Please.”

Disciple Nobleman: “I’ll get it done.”

Elder Maid Sister: “Then, as for our team, we’ll move in stealth. Having monitored the area for a while, I would say that at this time there are only five to eight people sleeping in the customs house. Let’s find a way to disarm them while spilling as little blood as possible.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Yeah.”

Small Mercenary: “Understood.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Shall I handle it?”

Elder Maid Sister: “Yes. Thank you.”

Small Mercenary: “Then, let’s get going.”

Young Mercenary: “Got it.”

——- **The Country of White Night, the Customs House**

Click, click

Mercenary Survivor: “I really can’t do this.”

Elder Maid Sister: “You’re up next.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Me!?”

Elder Maid Sister: “Yes, please go on.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Why am I doing such a thing.....”

Small Mercenary: “Hurry up.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Ugh. What’s wrong with this lock.”

Click

Resourceful Young Man: “Oh. I did it!”

Elder Maid Sister: “Excellent. You did well.”

Resourceful Young Man: “This sort of thing I do before I even start breakfast.”

Click

Mercenary Survivor: “Let’s go in.”

Small Mercenary: “Rear guard acknowledged and ready.”

Young Mercenary: “Point team in position.”

Mercenary Archer: “Backup is ready.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Don’t pretend to be professionals.”

Soldier of Light: “Whoa!”

Mercenary Survivor: “Hmph.”

Small Mercenary: “This room is secure.”

Soldier of Light: “Who, who are you!”

Whack!

Soldier of Light: “Ahh!”

Young Mercenary: “Alright. No problem here as well.”

Mercenary Archer: “This place doesn’t look very different from the buildings surrounding it. What purpose do we have here?”

Young Mercenary: “Let’s get away quickly.”

Elder Maid Sister: “Wait for a while. We’ll borrow a boat later and move out at the arranged time, if they could only make the rendezvous timing.....”

Resourceful Young Man: “Understood! Anything to get you from the Holy Empire!”

Elder Maid Sister: “No, no. This is immoral. Well, I am aware that in dangerous times, we may have to use some illegal means, but I can’t do such unscrupulous things. Robbery is bad, after all.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Then, why are we doing this?”

Elder Maid Sister: “We’ll borrow.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Huh?”

Elder Maid Sister: “We’re just borrowing some capital.”

Mercenary Survivor: “.....”

Small Mercenary: “.....?”

Resourceful Young Man: “How is that any different from robbery?”

Elder Maid Sister: “I’ll write up a notice of debt.”

Scribble, scribble

Mercenary Survivor: “.....”

Young Mercenary: “.....”

Resourceful Young Man: “Hey, is this girl serious?”

Mercenary Survivor: “Was the Disciple Nobleman serious about this?”

Small Mercenary: “It’s fine. She’s our Substitute after all.”

Young Mercenary: “The ship has already sailed on this, just accept it.”

Scribble, scribble

Elder Maid Sister: “Done. I’ll just leave this notice on the table. Umm, let’s go move out the gold. We don’t have time to count it, so let’s just take these five chests. They’re heavy, but that shouldn’t be an issue. If they’re too light, then they’re probably being used for something else. We wouldn’t want to have to come back.”

Mercenary Survivor: “She seems fairly happy to be doing this.”

Small Mercenary: “Really.”

Elder Maid Sister: “We’ll use this money as a sort of compensation to the crew of the ship. We’ll also buy over their food stocks, to the Polar Continent.”

Mercenary Survivor: “What? Polar.....!?”

Elder Maid Sister: “Let’s head to the Demon World without getting into trouble. I’ve got a whole mountain of things we need to do.”

----- The Kingdom of Metal, Craftsman's Street, in Front of the Guild Office

Flash!

The Demon King: "Ah."

The Chief Maid: "My legs are numb."

The Hero: "It's tough doing this three times in a row, huh."

The Demon King: "Yeah, my head hurts."

The Chief Maid: "My vision is really blurry."

The Hero: "It's just a matter of conditioning."

The Demon King: "Sorry. Next time, let's just walk there."

The Hero: "Don't worry about it. Aren't we in a hurry?"

The Demon King: "Yeah, this time, we're not after mass production. I fear that up till now, they've only been producing blades, for them to produce such prototypes in just a month is probably impossible, but....."

The Hero: "We won't know for sure until we ask the craftsmen."

The Demon King: "Yeah. Let's go. Come, Chief Maid."

The Chief Maid: "Yes, your Majesty."

The Hero: "Go!"

The Demon King: "Ahh, Hero!"

The Hero: "What is it?"

The Demon King: "Today, we only have an appointment with the metalworks craftsmen. It should be done by evening. I have heard that the bars and eateries in the area are something wonderful; but let's get back home by today."

The Hero: "Understood."

The Chief Maid: "Don't eat too much, alright? Hero. I've put in a lot of effort to make a magnificent feast today. Consider it a reward for your work, and a celebration of your return."

The Hero: "Got it! Alright!"

The Demon King: "Right then, let's go. Wait for us!"

Step, step, step

The Hero: "Sigh....."

The Hero: “Even if you say that.....”

——— *Until the Demon King comes back, I want to share a pillow with you*

The Hero: “Don’t tell me..... Tonight?”

The Hero: “I sure am sweating heavily. This is bad. How strange to be sweating so much. Even when I was fighting the Sigiled King, it didn’t feel like this. What should I do? What should I do? — Calm down? Right. That’s right. I’ve got to calm down first.”

The Mage nods

————— **The Kingdom of Metal, the Craftsman’s Quarter, an Alleyway**

The Hero: “B, behind me!?”

The Mage: “Hehehe.”

The Hero: “Where have you been!?”

The Mage: “.....I had some business.”

The Hero: “Where have you been?”

The Mage: “..... I had some business.”

The Hero: “What kind.”

The Mage: “..... Entry.”

The Hero: “I don’t understand.”

The Mage: “.....zzzz.”

The Hero: “Don’t fall asleep.” *Shakes the Mage*

The Mage: “..... Ah.”

The Hero: “Are you awake?”

The Mage nods

The Hero: “Somewhat.”

The Mage: “..... Hero.”

The Hero: “Yeah.”

The Mage: “How are you?”

The Hero: “Busy.”

The Mage: “..... Hehe.”

The Hero: “And how are you?”

The Mage: “..... Same.”

The Hero: “Right. It’s good that you are well.”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “?”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “What have you been doing?”

Star Sparrow: “Chirp, chirp! My mistress has been training long and hard! Chirp chirp! What have you been doing, mistress!”

The Mage: “..... Noisy bird.”

The Hero: “Is this your familiar?”

The Mage: “..... My alarm clock.”

The Hero: “Even with an alarm clock, it’s not like you wake up on time.”

The Mage: “..... With an alarm clock I can use the excuse that it didn’t ring.”

The Hero: “That’s irresponsible!”

The Mage nods

The Hero: “.....”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “Is something up?”

The Mage nods

The Hero: “Are you troubled?”

The Mage: “..... Somewhat.”

The Hero: “Let’s hear it.”

The Mage: “..... Economic equilibrium, in order to create a state of growth, the economic layer is dependent on the overall effects of layers of governmental and technical expertise. Moreover, for these overall effects to influence economic systems, a certain amount of time is required. On one hand, there could also be undesirable influences on other layers or sectors from economic growth, such as cultural or governmental lapses. But these drawbacks, if they are minor, will dissipate in time; if they are major, they can be responded with using policies, or otherwise by overwhelming military action, to reduce apprehension among the population.”

The Hero: “.....?”

The Mage: “Military attacks will leave a large scar on affected layers. The technical layer will suffer less damages. To begin with, knowledge is formless and can suffer no physical damage. It can even be surmised that technology flourishes in times of war, since military technological research becomes necessary, and technology once created, cannot be easily destroyed. However, military attacks definitely damage economic and governmental layers greatly. Moreover, while technical and governmental layers recover quickly, the economic field lags greatly behind. This is because of the needless exhaustion of ‘wealth’, the collection of the economic driving force. On the cultural layer, due to the possible extermination of some ethnicities, entire cultures may be irrevocably obliterated. Because of this, the application of the military layer is a slippery slope. — Is what the Demon King said.”

The Hero: “..... What’s this?”

The Mage: ““Exceptional questions require exceptional answers.””

The Hero: “.....”

The Mage: ““Why is it that the Hero and the Demon King exists together as individual entities?” For example, what if they were two Demon Kings and no Hero, how would things be different? Or why can’t there be three Heroes and maybe two Demon Kings?”

The Hero: “Eh?”

The Mage: “Such a situation has never been recorded in history.”

The Hero: “Why.....?”

The Mage: ““Why do the Hero and the Demon King fight?””

The Hero: “We aren’t fighting.”

The Mage: “..... This development only happened this time, until this time, the normal state has been war. It’s best to think of it as a special exception.”

The Hero: “I don’t understand.”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “Hey, Mage.”

The Mage: “The approximate of the Hero and the Demon King.”

The Hero: “Eh?”

The Mage: “The Hero of the Demon World is the Demon King. The Demon King of the Human World is the Hero. It’s not that either side has been attempting to imitate the other, but the essence is the same. The same, but two. Why two? Why the same? Exactly what is the defining differential factor?”

The Hero: "Is there an answer to such questions?"

The Mage: "There is usually an answer. Even though they may not be unified."

The Hero: "Then, why?"

The Mage: "....."

The Hero: "..... No, I feel like I'll get a bad answer if I ask."

The Mage: "I'll tell you."

The Hero: "Time out."

The Mage: "I can't wait."

The Hero: "That's why."

The Mage: "Hero, perhaps at the dual terminals of the Demon King's existence, there is a split."

The Hero: "Split.....?"

The Mage: "Right. It's highly unlikely for there to be two points of differentiation. To begin with, the chance of there being two existences in this world is already too low. The present world is the only one I have seen which has the two existences."

The Hero: "I don't understand."

The Mage: "In other words, a thread. On the right end of the thread is the Hero. On the left end, the Demon King. — That's the answer. Usually, the two have set existences, they are two, without a third, confrontational in their time periods. From the moment when the two ends come into contact with each other, convergence begins. As the two ends join, they form a circle, and the world is complete. The string which ties the world together, makes the world smaller, and at the same time 'repairs' it."

The Hero: "Huh!?"

The Mage: "Continuing from those ancient days with the Flame, the true endless legend is what we are currently in."

The Hero: "My head hurts."

The Mage: "The Demon King of this world has not used this extra power on the war. I don't understand what kind of miracle this is, but rather than following the example set by the previous Demon Kings, she's gone independent, and so dreams of a different route. Or perhaps, she's independent because he has dreamt it..... And this ability will be set aside to enlarge the world. Moreover, whether its coincidence or predestination, the Demon King or the Hero has been killed in every world, except this one.

The enlargement begins technically or economically, but following that, a ripple starts to spread and influence neighbouring layers: the governmental, diplomatic, cultural, even

the legendary layers. When the terminals come into contact with each other, the end to the conflict goes into motion. Unrelated to that is the expansionary effect the Demon King and the Hero have on the world. When the speed of expansion or contraction averages out, then the world will be still. The answer put forth by the Demon King is definitely not wrong. However, in order to carry out what needs to be done, the fundamental illnesses of the world must be considered.”

The Hero: “Illness? Still?”

The Mage: “— Yes. It’s not a sin, but an illness. For this reason, reality will likely continue to act on us. This is one of the distortions of the redundancy system.”

The Hero: “Did something happen?”

The Mage nods

The Hero: “Something terrible?”

The Mage: “..... I fear all will be exterminated.”

The Hero: “.....!”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “That’s a joke, right?”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “What should we do? You must have a solution.”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “Hey, Mage.”

The Mage shakes head

The Hero: “Hey.”

The Mage: “Structurally, one of our needs is to change the structure itself. The present situation cannot permit the continuation of the present structure. — That has been the answer, but—“

The Hero: “What is it?”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “I’ll do anything, so tell me!”

The Mage: “— Anything?”

The Hero: “Anything at all.”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: "Please, please..... Please."

The Mage: "..... Sneaky as always."

The Hero: "Eh?"

The Mage: "....."

The Hero: "Mage.....?"

The Mage: "Having come to such a time, hesitation is forbidden."

——— **The Kingdom of Metal, the Craftsmen Quarter, the Guild Headquarters**

The Demon King: "Alright. All done!"

The Chief Maid: "How was it? How were the results?"

The Demon King: "I believe I am now able to fulfil the request of the Female Paladin. We can increase the range by three times. In a war, we want to be able to prevent damage before it actually happens, but if we could minimise the damage once it happens, that would be good too."

The Chief Maid: "Really."

The Demon King: "Where is the Hero? No, perhaps before searching for the Hero, we should find a place to stay."

The Mage: "Well, well, my, my."

The Demon King: "No. There wasn't a special meaning behind that."

The Chief Maid: "Let's do that then."

The Mage appears

The Demon King: "Whoa..... Oh, if it isn't the Mage."

The Mage: "....." *Nods*

The Chief Maid: "It's been a while. We haven't seen each other since our holiday, I suppose."

The Mage: "..... Tribe of the Library, just where we should be."

The Chief Maid: "....."

The Demon King: "Where have you been?"

The Mage: "..... The mountains."

The Chief Maid: "?"

The Demon King: “.....”

The Mage nods

The Chief Maid: “What’s happened?”

The Demon King: “As the Tribe of the Library, it’s rare for us to be able to meet like this. To begin with, we are few in number, and most of us don’t get out and see the world very much. We’re all hard at work restoring the research laboratories and the bookshelves. Coming into contact with each other is truly precious. The Chief Maid and I are exceptions..... That’s why”

The Mage: “.....”

The Demon King: “What is it?”

The Mage: “..... Two things. Firstly, I want to know about the Sky Pavilion.”

The Chief Maid: “Sky Pavilion?”

The Demon King: “..... That’s—“

The Mage: “As the Demon King, I’m sure you know. I’m not sure if this is an oral transmission or some kind of memory transfer. But all the Demon Kings in history have known about the place. I don’t have proof on this, but the succession implies this. It is the place where you will offer the head of the Hero as sacrifice.”

The Demon King: “And the other thing?”

The Mage: “The Demon King is away on a trip. To save you all. I’ve come to fulfil the task he was set to do for you.”

——— **The Demon World, the City of the Gate, a Temporary Worksite**

“Hey, ho!”

“Come on!”

Fiend Worker: “Hey! Bring another roller!”

Human Technician: “Alright, roll it!”

Giant Worker: “Haaah.....! Let’s go, let’s go!”

Gong!

Middle Aged Merchant: “My, my!”

Disciple Engineer: “Ahh! Merchant!”

Middle Aged Merchant: “What a lot of people!”

Disciple Engineer: “Yep.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “How did you even get this many people? I can’t have sent you enough money to hire all of them, did I?”

Disciple Engineer: “Well, umm.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “I stepped in.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “So it was you, princess.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Please don’t call me that.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Hahahahahaha. Then, what did you do?”

Disciple Engineer: “The Fire Dragon Lady introduced me to the people of the street.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “No, no. What the Disciple Engineer said was fairly interesting. In order to support the Middle Aged Merchant..... I feel this is what I should do. But for a project of such scale, we will never have enough funds to cover the costs. We will also need the help of the people of the city to renovate the temples.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Temples?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “From the beginning, this city has had many ancient and nameless gods, hence the many temples in the area. The residents of the city, to different extents, pay homage to the various temples, praying for daily peace or successful business. With the success we are enjoying today, we are accumulating goodwill and the people are more than happy to lend their hand to the work.”

Disciple Engineer: “The temples in this city are built highly durably, and can even be used as fortresses. The road networks cut through the mountainsides, so we should be able to procure quarry materials. Firstly, we will renovate the temples.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “But, shouldn’t our first priority be to repair the walls or to improve the layout of the city?”

Disciple Engineer: “Please look at this map.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Yes.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Is this of the surroundings?”

Disciple Engineer: “These nine temples and this site form a defensive perimeter, and for it to be connected with the wall, the city needs to expand in this direction. It’s true that the distance is fairly large, and we will have to increase our workload, but if we use the walls of one of the temples as a starting point, we can decrease our workload substantially. ——— The funding you have provided for me has all been spent on food. We want to make sure our workers eat their fill, even more so than today. That’s the way I do things.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “So that our workers look forward to it as well.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “And then you’ll need to start work?”

Disciple Engineer: “Yes, somehow or another. I can’t just rely on the Fire Dragon Lady though.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Without a real overview, I can’t write up a real proposal.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “In other words, the plans are for a structure which includes the temples?”

Disciple Engineer: “Yes, the temples are being used as *Tenailles** for the fortress.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Hmm. And this part?”

Disciple Engineer: “Digging.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “What for?”

Disciple Engineer: “A dry moat. This has the effect of making the fortifications taller to the attackers. We can’t have a real moat because of the lack of water in the area.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “The walls are rather thick, aren’t they?”

Disciple Engineer: “Yeah.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Do they really need that *Thickness**? Whether made by stone or by earth, it’ll take a great deal of effort to create this..... This shape, rather than a wall, it looks like a sloped wall.”

Disciple Engineer: “That’s. Well. Yeah.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “?”

Disciple Engineer: “It’s necessary. In this age, and in the next age too. The enemy aren’t Demons right? Then, these fortifications serve a fundamental purpose. My teacher said this as well. An engineer cannot have a shallow view of creating things only necessary to the present. We must take steps a hundred years in advance..... For the people who call this place their home, we must do our best work.”

Explanation

Ternaille: A ternaille is the jutting-out part on a star fortification. The placement of the ternailles removes dead zones where defenders can hide and also creates overlapping fields of fire to maximise firepower.

Thickness: The Disciple Engineer is engineering a new generation of fortifications in preparation for cannon warfare. These fortifications tend to be low and thick, in order to take the impact of a cannonball without crumbling.

——— **The Village of Wintering, the Manor of the Demon King, the Guest Room**

The Female Paladin: “Bathed, hair combed, skincare done too.”

The Female Paladin: “.....”

The Female Paladin: “Ah, alright.”

Pat, pat

The Female Paladin: “I’m all fired up!”

The Female Paladin: “..... Am I?”

The Female Paladin: “Mmm..... What’s this? When it comes to crunchtime, I always get uneasy. Once it’s over, completely over, I resent that weakness..... No, when we get the final weapons for the Holy Order of the Lake, what will we do then?”

The Female Paladin: “.....”

—— *Touches boobs*

The Female Paladin: (..... As expected, this is it, huh?)

The Female Paladin sulks

The Female Paladin: “This alone, is..... This is not even a quarter of the Demon King. No, maybe it is. Not necessarily. It’s definitely not true that it’s nothing. In other words, it’s not zero. It’s just small. Right? They say if you rub it, it gets bigger, right? Then I’ve got to work hard!”

The Female Paladin: “.....”

The Female Paladin: “It’s ineffective.”

The Female Paladin: “If this is the enemy, then I all I need is a bit more enthusiasm, but.....”

The Female Paladin: (No, that’s wrong. —— It’s the same. The enemy isn’t the problem. It’s my own feelings.)

The Female Paladin: (..... That being said, what did my teacher tell me? “Treat him like a horse.”)

The Female Paladin: (Panties, huh..... Well, I never thought of that. Even though my teacher spoke well of it, a perverse thing is still a perverse thing..... Well, it’s a useful perverse thing. Hmm? Silk socks? These must be expensive.)

Puts on stockings

The Female Paladin: (Oh? It’s very fitting.)

Puts on stockings

The Female Paladin: "This is weird."

Shuffles around

The Female Paladin: (..... Is it supposed to be like this? It feels like I'm only wearing it halfway, and it might slip off. This? What's up with this. It's comfortable though..... Hahaha.....)

Door opens

The Female Paladin: "This is too embarrassing!"

The Demon King: "....."

The Female Paladin: "Ahh!?"

The Demon King: "....."

The Female Paladin: "Oh. Demon King. You scared me, you're early."

The Demon King: "..... Yeah."

The Female Paladin: "What is it?"

The Demon King: "Yeah."

The Female Paladin: ".....?"

The Demon King: "It ends today."

The Female Paladin: "What is going on?"

The Demon King: "The Hero has left on a mission..... It seems there's a time limit."

The Female Paladin: "?"

The Demon King: "We can't let the chance go by."

The Female Paladin: "What are you on about?"

The Demon King: "I don't understand myself. But in order to change the flow, the Hero knows something, and left to act..... That's what the Mage told me."

The Female Paladin: "....."

The Demon King: "..... That's why the Hero isn't here."

The Female Paladin: "....."

The Demon King: "He left me here and went away."

The Female Paladin: "....."

The Demon King: “He left us and went away.”

The Female Paladin: “.....”

The Demon King: “.....”

The Female Paladin: “Demon King.”

The Demon King: “Female Paladin?”

The Female Paladin: “It’s not good to think of such troublesome things, Demon King.”

The Demon King: “.....”

The Female Paladin: “The Hero is going to return home properly. He’s definitely okay. I, well, haha..... Even though I don’t have the patience for this, this is the second time he’s gone and done this? But, he’ll be fine. The Hero will definitely come home safe. And compared to that time, the Hero is even kinder, even stronger.”

The Demon King: “.....”

The Female Paladin: “The real issue at hand is how many girls he’s going to have when he comes back this time, but..... he’s going to come back.”

The Demon King: “..... Really?”

The Female Paladin: “Definitely. And the Hero left to protect us right? He left so that he can come back, right? That’s why, it’s different from that day.”

The Demon King: “.....”

The Female Paladin: “Above that, we need to save the Hero.”

The Demon King: “Save?”

The Female Paladin: “That’s right..... Something is going on sure, right? With things the way they are, we can’t take the place of the Hero right now. But there are still many things which we need to do even without the Hero. These are things only we can do in his place.”

The Demon King: “.....”

The Female Paladin: “The Battle of the Plains of Scilla is over, and there is calm, but..... I’ve always felt it somewhere. That the war has come to an end.”

The Demon King: “.....”

The Female Paladin: “With this, our war is over. If the Central Continent invades the Demon World, then it might lead to war with the Demon World, but that is not our problem..... Well, it’s not unimaginable, but that’s not the way it works. The Hero definitely isn’t going to give up like this. If he was the kind of Hero who would give up like that, then I wouldn’t like him the way I do.”

The Demon King: “.....” *nods*

The Female Paladin: “That’s why, the Hero is doing things one way or another, but he’s doing everything he needs to. Now I understand. Actually, I felt it that day as well, but..... The Hero would never leave us alone forever.”

The Demon King: “Is that so.....”

The Female Paladin: “Definitely.”

The Demon King: “I still have things I need to do.....”

The Female Paladin: “Of course.”

The Demon King: “..... Yes.”

The Female Paladin: “Say it properly!”

The Demon King: “Yes, yes. I understand.”

The Female Paladin: “Right. Then. Let’s go.”

The Demon King: “Ah, Female Paladin.”

The Female Paladin: “What?”

The Demon King: “Well, umm. It’s very fetching, but..... Don’t you find that underwear just a little bit revealing?”

—— **On Board the Merchant Vessel, *The Wings of the Sea***

Waves crashing

“Hey ho!”

“Hey ho!”

Disciple Nobleman: “It’s cold.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Amazing! Hey dude, this is my first time on a ship!”

Disciple Nobleman: “Don’t call me dude. You can call me Disciple, or Sir. But well, don’t call me Master. That title’s reserved for some pretty eyed lady somewhere.”

Elder Sister Maid: “..... Eh?”

Resourceful Young Man: “Hey! Dude! What’s that? Birds!? Whoa! Amazing! This is the sea, what are you doing here!”

Mercenary Survivor: “Hey. Change of watch.”

Small Mercenary: “Thanks.”

Young Mercenary: “Good morning.”

Mercenary Archer: “What pleasant weather. Hey, Captain!”

Captain: “What’s up, you fools.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Sorry, sorry.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Well, I hope you can forgive us.”

Captain: “Well, we’re all loaded up I guess. I’ve already resigned myself to it. So shall we head to the Polar Continent?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes please.”

Captain: “Well, I hope you can understand when I say that’ll be the end of our relationship.”

Resourceful Young Man: “I feel bad about this.”

Mercenary Survivor: “We didn’t have a choice.”

Elder Sister Maid: “That guy was originally just a merchant. He’s not an enemy we have to destroy, unlike the Crusaders. I feel guilty about involving him in this, but at the time we had no other options.....”

Resourceful Young Man: “But you almost made his eyes pop out, eh?”

Mercenary Survivor: “It’s no small sum of money after all.”

Small Mercenary: “Indeed.”

Resourceful Young Man: “But isn’t it a bit wasteful?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Is money something you can’t live without?”

Resourceful Young Man: “——“

Mercenary Survivor: “Well. Ahahahahaha. Now that you’re a mercenary, that isn’t something you should be saying, Substitute?”

Young Mercenary: “Yeah.”

Disciple Nobleman: “Well then, now we’ll be headed to the Portal. We’ve bought over the cargo of the ship so we should have enough warm clothes and food to last. We’ve even got the new models of muskets, and those are quite scary.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Indeed.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Muskets? You mean these tubes?”

Mercenary Survivor: “They have terrific firepower.”

Small Mercenary: “I wonder.”

Mercenary Archer: “They are somewhat like crossbows.”

Disciple Nobleman: “More importantly, what are our plans for after this?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yeah.”

Mercenary Survivor: “This guy.”

Young Mercenary nods

Mercenary Archer: “At this time, we want to ask what the objective of making such a long journey is. We may be hired, but at this point, we have already been dragged into the conflict, right? So just tell us.”

Disciple Nobleman: “Yes, that’s right.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes.”

Mercenary Survivor: “I understand that we will be going into the Demon World from the Polar Continent. But what are our plans there?”

Disciple Nobleman: “Our goals are completely the same.”

Young Mercenary: “I understand now.”

Mercenary Archer: “What?”

Young Mercenary: “How to ask our Substitute out.”

Mercenary Archer: “How?”

Young Mercenary: “You need to think about all sorts of things.”

Disciple Nobleman: “First, we’ll walk around the Demon World a bit, and then we’ll negotiate for a ceasefire between the Holy Crusaders and the Demons.”

Elder Sister Maid nods

Mercenary Survivor: “.....”

Small Mercenary: “Huh!?”

Young Mercenary: “Wait. What?”

Mercenary Archer: “Ah, ahh.”

Disciple Nobleman: “What are you saying? There aren’t even a hundred of us.”

Disciple Nobleman: “Yes, well. Listen to me. We don’t intend to actually be able to put a stop to the war. To go up against the Demons, the Holy Crusaders need to be supported with a massive capital investments coming from more than half the countries of the Central Continent. Having departed with such responsibilities, there’s no way they’d be

willing to return having achieved anything. But, stay with me. If war is unavoidable, then the question is where will it stop, right?”

Resourceful Young Man: “Where?”

Mercenary Survivor: “Hmm.”

Disciple Nobleman: “Usually, it ends when the enemy has been exterminated.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Doesn’t it? I get that feel from the Crusaders.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Well, yeah.”

Disciple Nobleman: “But even then, there are still limits. For example, the Kingdom of Branches and the Kingdom of Copper have fought wars in the past, but in the end, they were still able to set aside their grievances. After a monetary compensation and the cessation of some lands, they managed to calm down. The Kingdom of Moonsand lost the war and was eliminated, but they were just integrated into the Kingdom of Dunes, their population didn’t get exterminated or anything.”

Mercenary Archer: “That’s true now that you say it.”

Disciple Nobleman: “It’s nonsense to massacre civilians who didn’t even participate in the war. Firstly, from a population perspective, it’s not realistic. Whether the Crusaders were to win or to lose the battle, they would face threats all around. A ceasefire would definitely be useful at this time. Even a ceasefire cannot be established, through this, some sort of communication may at least be achievable.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Of course we earnestly hope for a ceasefire, but, it’s definitely difficult..... What I’m thinking of is somewhat different from the Disciple Nobleman. I want to impress upon the participants the dangers of the war.”

Mercenary Survivor: “What do you mean?”

Elder Sister Maid: “War is a painful and terrible thing, right? People die, or live cold and hungry lives. Men are free organisms and countries should be the same. We are opposed to war as individuals, but it is an undeniable presence in our lives. This is too terrible to even be expressed in words, but..... There are probably things in this world which can only be resolved through war. However, the present war is not one in which every man is fighting for freedom. And so I want to give an opportunity to those who earnestly wish for the war to end.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Umm.”

Small Mercenary: “You said it very smoothly, but you weren’t actually condemning the war right? What you said was closer to, ‘For now, I’m still going to condone it.’”

Young Mercenary: “..... Ah.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes, you could say that.”

Resourceful Young Man: “H, huh?”

Mercenary Survivor: “Huh!?”

Elder Sister Maid: “No need to be so surprised..... It would be narrow-minded to think that the only kind of negotiations result in complete peace.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Well yes, that may be so, but that’s the kind of thing which is said by people who are trying to suppress the world with violence.”

Elder Sister Maid: “That may be so, but there is that risk that the Crusaders or the Demons will be exterminated, right?”

Disciple Nobleman: “Mmm.”

Elder Sister Maid: “The way I see it, the Crusaders and the Demons are crossing a frozen, and very dangerous bridge..... Every step they take is a danger. There is no way they can tell, but they can only move slowly through it.”

Mercenary Survivor: “What do you mean?”

Elder Sister Maid: “A war of attrition..... If that’s what it comes to, then there may not even be 10 people left in this world.”

Young Mercenary: “Attrition?”

Disciple Nobleman: “In other words, a war based on how many people you can kill each day.”

Mercenary Survivor: “What? Isn’t that normal? For a force of 1,000 soldiers, 20 dead would be considered a grievous injury, 50 would be a tragedy and a hundred would be enough to make the next battle impossible. It’s to the extent that half a year would be insufficient to replenish the numbers.”

Small Mercenary: “Is that so?”

Elder Sister Maid: “That is not a constant.”

Mercenary Survivor: “I don’t understand.”

Elder Sister Maid: “It’s not something set in stone. Well, it’s not like I’ve gone and researched it earnestly, but apparently in a battle between musketeers, a hundred soldiers per thousand could be killed in half a day.”

Disciple Nobleman: “..... Shocking, right?”

Mercenary Survivor: “A hundred!?”

Small Mercenary: “Wait, do you mean to say that what would be lost in a week of war could take place in one day!?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Of course there are reasons.”

Mercenary Survivor: "What reasons?"

Elder Sister Maid: "Lots of reasons. Firstly, the musket is an extremely powerful weapon. From a close enough distance, even a full suit of battle armour will not stop it. However, with a musket, your defensive abilities do not increase. This ship is stocked with large amounts of the new model of musket, the flintlock, but this is an improvement to shot efficiency and reload speed. Even for this new model, the only shield which exists is your own body..... In other words, this is a weapon with no defensive abilities, but great offensive capability."

Disciple Nobleman: "There are others as well. In a battlefield of muskets, a large number of infantrymen are usually field. You saw it right? That amazing number of Crusaders."

Mercenary Archer nods

Disciple Nobleman: "Those were serfs trained only to wield muskets. You all have long experiences as mercenaries, so you understand right? On the battlefield, survival is all that matters. As long as you survive, there is something you can still do. Chances only come to those who are alive. But for these guys, survival is less important for them than shooting the enemy. That's what they were trained to do, not to survive."

Mercenary Survivor: "..... I understand that much."

Elder Sister Maid: "Just now you talked about losing in a day more than what we would usually lose in a week, but that's not even the worst case. If a commander were to go through even a moment of carelessness, that gap could cause the death of most of his troops. Moreover, in just one hour of desperate carnage, even people who shouldn't have been killed may be slaughtered. For example, if two knights in armour and armed with swords were to duel with each other, the fight would take too much out of them. They would be exhausted as well. In this case, the match may be declared a stalemate and they could find another day to fight, or even repair their relationship in the meantime. Furthermore, the fight would be specific, and you would only engage somebody you want to kill; it's very difficult to kill indiscriminately. In the age of muskets, the chance of lethal engagements has become much higher. ——— 'Kill the enemy before we can repair our relations', this is the new horrific mantra which has taken over the battlefield. And on top of that..... the Demons have muskets too."

Mercenary Survivor: "Really!?"

Elder Sister Maid: "Even if they don't actually have it right now, that technology is bound to fall into their hands eventually. No, it's likely they have weapons even more technologically advanced than that. Even though the Mistress isn't one for war-like things. That being said—— With people killing each other, this is a tug of war on the borderline of the too dangerous."

Small Mercenary: "..... This conversation is too heavy for mercenaries like us."

Elder Sister Maid: “Perhaps the blood demanded by the turn of an era is more than the total combined blood of the Human and Demon Races. If so, then we are looking at the demise of the world.”

Disciple Nobleman: “Huh?”

Elder Sister Maid: “No..... That’s my line.”

Mercenary Survivor: “So will we be able to win over both sides with this talk of attrition rates?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Well, I believe we won’t need to persuade the Demons of this.”

Disciple Nobleman: “Really?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yeah. They are aware of this.”

Disciple Nobleman: “I am grateful for that. It is most important to understand your opponent in negotiations.”

Young Mercenary: “Well, for the sake of these negotiations, we will hold strong while the Substitute is in the Demon World.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yeah, we will need many strategies, but..... That being said, a nameless person like me can’t suddenly start holding meetings with the leadership of the Holy Empire.”

Small Mercenary: “That’s common sense, but it doesn’t make it any more difficult.”

Elder Sister Maid: “In any case, we have to go to the Demon World.”

——— **The Kingdom of Winter, the Winter Palace, the Office of Accounts**

Disciple Merchant: “How is it?”

Assistant: “Warm!”

Disciple Merchant: “Your fingers?”

Assistant: “Comfortable, and not tight! It’s nice, these gloves are really soft, aren’t they? Amazing. They’re waterproof too, right?”

Disciple Merchant: “If you wear it tightly.”

Assistant: “It’s really soft.”

Disciple Merchant: “Hey, hey, stop rubbing them now.”

Assistant: “Ehehehe.” *Rub, rub*

Door opens

Seneschal: “I’ve been wearing it.”

Disciple Merchant: “And how is it?”

Seneschal: “I don’t understand why, but it’s very warm, warmer than any other glove I have ever worn. Moreover, it’s really light. What is it?”

Disciple Merchant: “The pelt is thin, and there’s a second inner layer of down feathers. It’s definitely significantly more expensive, but how is it?”

Seneschal: “Yes, it’s wonderful.”

Disciple Merchant: “The Kingdom of Winter is really good at making this sort of winter gear.”

Assistant: “Very warm.”

Seneschal: “Why did you suddenly propose an improvement in our winter equipment?”

Disciple Merchant: “It’s nothing sudden. But I suppose it might seem that way. The Demons don’t attack every year, but the winter does, doesn’t it? That’s why winter gear can be considered beneficial to the entire country. It’s a plan that’s been considered for a long time.”

Assistant: “I see—“ *Smiles*

Disciple Merchant: “It is really becoming very important.”

Assistant: “?”

Seneschal: “.....?”

Disciple Merchant: “Moreover, our country is in need of soldiers right now, right? With more soldiers, we will need to provide higher quality outercoats and gloves, right? This is essential to prevent the loss of morale. With the winter coming, there will be an increased need for surveillance patrols as well.”

Seneschal: “Yes, that’s true.”

Disciple Merchant: “With the establishment of the financial bank, we should be able to accomplish things like this.”

Seneschal: “Bank? Apart from borrowing money, what else can you do with a bank?”

Disciple Merchant: “If we could only come up with a prototype, a bank would allow us to borrow money to begin an enterprise. In this case, the enterprises can be joined by merchants with distributive capital and the craftsmen of textile guilds. And hence, we can begin production. There would be a lot of work. Firstly, we have to distribute the gloves and overcoats to the soldiers. After that, in the same manner, we should aim to produce more equipment for sale. Even if it’s a good idea and a good product, the impoverished guild’s priority is still to make money, and a side effect of this is that many jobs will be created as well.”

Seneschal: "But..... If we borrow money from the bank and the job fails, what should we do? The bank would lose money, wouldn't it?"

Disciple Merchant: "That's why the prototype is so important. A plan is good enough, though. Based on this information, as well as the personality and history of the workmen involved, the bank decides whether or not to lend money to the entrepreneurs. The borrower is not a government official, and the bank is not a government institution. This means that both parties have interest in the success of the business; they should be comrades..... Well, this is just second-hand information from my teacher. But that would be a win-win scenario for everybody."

Assistant: "We can also store cheese!"

Seneschal: "How difficult."

Disciple Merchant: "This country is blessed. The people are simple and hardworking, with powerful smiles. If there is nothing, then they will find a way to develop it..... That's right, 'if there is nothing'."

——— **The Kingdom of Metal, the Barracks, the Office**

Disciple Soldier: "I want the next set of documents."

Metal Lieutenant: "Yes." *Shuffles paper*

Disciple Soldier: "Mmhmm..... This is good."

Metal Lieutenant: "You've already decided."

Disciple Soldier: "Yes, everyone is working hard to beef up our preparations."

Metal Lieutenant: "Right. I know the importance of securing our borders from the previous war."

Disciple Soldier: "Communications methods are also important."

Metal Lieutenant: "We'll need to build up signal towers quickly."

Disciple Soldier: "We should be able to finish building that next year. We'll finish the bulk of our measurements and preparations by autumn and we should finish work next year."

Metal Lieutenant: "Yes."

Disciple Soldier: "Mm....."

Metal Lieutenant: "What is it?"

Disciple Soldier: "This is from one of the released spies from the old Kingdom of White Night."

Metal Lieutenant: “Hmm.”

Disciple Soldier: “..... As expected, there are domestic issues. It seems they’ve been doing military drills endlessly.”

Metal Lieutenant: “Drills.....”

Disciple Soldier: “They don’t have anything else to do, then.”

Disciple Soldier: “Next.”

Metal Lieutenant: “Here.”

Disciple Soldier: “This is from the Coast Guard.”

Metal Lieutenant: “Understood.”

Disciple Soldier: “We’ll carry out parades and military exercises under the command of the first platoon. It’s about time, then?”

Metal Lieutenant: “Yes, I’ll prepare the notice.”

Disciple Soldier: “Then, the reports on the revenues from the settlements.”

Metal Lieutenant: “Here they are.”

Disciple Soldier: “Call the principal clerk and have him double copy this, and send one to the Disciple Merchant in the Kingdom of Winter. I’ll fill out a letter for him. Send the other one as a report to the King.”

Metal Lieutenant: “I’ll have the report ready soon.”

Disciple Soldier: “Thank you.”

Metal Lieutenant: “.....”

Disciple Soldier: “Then, what is the status of the training of the Imperial Guards?”

Metal Lieutenant: “I’ve rejected it.”

Disciple Soldier: “Eh?”

Metal Lieutenant: “What were you thinking to propose such a thing?”

Disciple Soldier: “Ah, well, I thought everybody, wanted to.....”

Metal Lieutenant: “You thought wrong.”

Disciple Soldier: “.....”

Metal Lieutenant: “We work together. What is the point of asking me to do this?”

Disciple Soldier: “Y, yes.....”

Metal Lieutenant: "Yes."

———— **The Kingdom of Winter, the Square in front of the Palace, Consulate**

Lone Winter King: "Here?"

Assistant: "Right here! I've come loads of times."

Seneschal: "Hoho."

Master Craftsman: "Hey, boy!"

Assistant: "Hello!"

Lone Winter King: "How have you been?"

Master Craftsman: "If it isn't the King! Is this alright!? You shouldn't be here without a guard, should you?"

Seneschal: "How rude. I'm right here."

Disciple Merchant: "Well it's good for a King to get around and see his Kingdom every now and then."

Lone Winter King: "Hahaha! Good. This is my beloved Kingdom of winter. This is its core. I'm the King after all, how could I neglect the security of the land?"

Master Craftsman: "Hahahahaha! What a thing to say!"

Disciple Merchant: "We're here to inspect the worksite."

Master Craftsman: "Is that so? Oh look."

Fairy Maiden flits about

Craftsman: "Wow"

Labourer: "Whoa."

Master Craftsman: "Don't tell me....."

Fairy Maiden: "I Am A Fairy, And I Will Be Staying At The Consulate."

Master Craftsman: "It spoke!"

Fairy Maiden: "Yes, I Like Speaking!"

Craftsman: "Whoa, it floats."

Labourer: "It's my first time seeing one, is this a Demon?"

Fairy Maiden: "?"

Master Craftsman: "Ko, ko."

Disciple Merchant: “You’re cold?”

Master Craftsman: “Konichiwa?”

Fairy Maiden: “I Am The Fairy Maiden, Of The Tribe Of Fairies, Of The Demon Race. Thank You For Building This Consulate For Us. The Queen Extends Her Gratitude To You Once Again.”

Master Craftsman: “Wow, it can really talk!”

Disciple Merchant: “It’s been talking from the start.”

Assistant: “Master Craftsman, this is the Fairy Maiden. She’s an amazing person who can even speak to cats. She will be residing in this Consulate.”

Winter Civilian: “This is a Demon?”

Lone Winter King: “As previously announced, as a result of the ceasefire, we are now at peace with the Demon World. It may be a bit strange, but from now on, there may be more Demon faces. I humbly beg for your understanding.”

Disciple Merchant: (What sort of reaction will that cause.....)

Fairy Maiden: “.....?”

Master Craftsman: “..... Whoa. It has wings. Why, lady. In that case I can just remove the stairs in this three story building. How impressive..... that surprised me!”

Craftsman: “How small.”

Labourer: “Have we been fighting with such ladylike enemies all this while?”

Seneschal: “Oh no. Demons come in all shapes and sizes. It’s just that the ones who have come to live among us are the sort which are better at communicating and fitting into our streets.”

Labourer: “Is that so?”

Middle Aged Woman: “I see! If he had lost to these girls, my grandfather would be so ashamed! Ahahaha!”

Female Pedestrian: “..... How beautiful.”

Master Craftsman: “I am a craftsman. I am skilled at the finer details. I want to make a home which will make its residents happier.”

Lone Winter King: “Really, thank you.”

Disciple Merchant: “..... They took it better than I expected!”

Assistant: “That’s normal.”

Disciple Merchant: “Really?”

Assistant: “The Order of the Lake has been teaching that the Demons are also children of the Spirit of Light.”

Seneschal: “Now that you say it, they have.”

Fairy Maiden: “Is That So?”

Winter Civilian: “The Templar said so right? That even with this terrible war, in the world, they can also be the friends of us humans.”

Thin Soldier: “But Demons cannot be trusted. We cannot let up our surveillance of them.”

Middle Aged Woman: “There are many types of Demons. Even though Grandpa didn’t come back, we knew he really hated them.....”

Teenager: “If it comes to that, we’ll just destroy them like we did at the Isle of Light! Long live the Female Paladin!”

Lone Winter King: “.....”

Disciple Merchant: “Hmm.....”

Seneschal: “—— The timing is probably good.”

Disciple Merchant: “What do you mean?”

Seneschal: “Taking back the Isle of Light has won the approval of our population. And the Order of the Lake has really expanded regionally.”

Lone Winter King: (..... That’s true. Taking back the island has started us on a new road. What will happen to this world?)

Labourer: “If you think about it, the vaccination against smallpox was discovered in the Demon World, wasn’t it?”

Craftsman: “Yeah. I heard that too.”

Winter Civilian: “I am really grateful for that.”

Female Pedestrian: “Me too!”

Lone Winter King: “Isn’t the vaccination an essential thing? I’ve heard that the discovery is being talked about in neighbouring countries, so that people who are not citizens of our countries are not doing their best to free themselves.”

Assistant: “A medicine for sleepy people!”

Labourer: “You want to be sleepy?”

Assistant: “Just a bit, and you get sleepy real fast.”

Disciple Merchant: “Hahahaha. That’s true. It’s just a side effect, and it means that the medicine is weak enough not to affect you very badly. Even children can receive it.”

Assistant: “My whole family has received it.”

Fairy Maiden: “Really?”

Labourer: “Hahaha, what a beautiful voice.”

Craftsman: “Really a nice voice.”

Fairy Maiden: “Oh Come Now.”

Assistant: “Don’t make her blush.”

Female Pedestrian: “I have a nice voice too!”

Labourer: “You’re small and cute, you are.”

Winter Civilian: “Ahahahaha!”

Master Craftsman: “Alright, in that case, allow me to present to you and his Majesty the King, our plans for the Consulate.”

Lone Winter King: (This is starting to have some mixed results. It’s really not a simple process. But, we can’t expect the bridge the gap in one step. For the next hundred years ahead of us, we have to take this one step. — That is what I want to believe.)

Chapter 5, “It’s Somehow Very Important.”

—— The Wastelands of the Subterranean World, the Journey of the Mercenary Knights

Resourceful Young Man: “Whoa, amazing.”

Mercenary Survivor: “It’s an endless expanse of red soil in every direction. What’s that over there..... a forest?”

Small Survivor: “What brilliant eyesight.”

Young Mercenary nods

Mercenary Archer: “Did passing through that portal do anything to us?”

Disciple Nobleman: “We’ll be in the Northeast soon.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Whoa, dude. You’re familiar with this place too?”

Disciple Nobleman: “Don’t call me dude. It would be childish to infiltrate an unknown land like thieves, wouldn’t it?”

Resourceful Young Man: “What are you saying?”

Mercenary Survivor: “Don’t get violent, you’ll scare the horses.”

Small Survivor: “This area is cold too.”

Young Mercenary: “Yeah.”

Disciple Nobleman: “Well, I’ve got a map.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Eh?”

Elder Sister Maid: “It was given to us by the merchants who pass through this area.”

Resourceful Young Man: “?”

Disciple Nobleman: “Can’t you tell? She’s an intelligence agent dispatched by the Kingdom of Winter, she’s here to gather intelligence on maps and other situations.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Say that earlier!”

Disciple Nobleman: “I wonder what would have happened if I had told you earlier?”

Resourceful Young Man: “That’s.....”

Disciple Nobleman: “Well, then, the guiding principles of our mission are—“

Resourceful Young Man: “You better be open about it!”

Mercenary Survivor: "About that, I think it's about time we learnt what we were doing here."

Small Survivor: "That's right. We've come all the way to the Demon World with you, so you'd best do some explaining."

Young Mercenary nods

Resourceful Young Man: "That's right! Don't disregard us!"

Disciple Nobleman: "Fine, fine. Since even the kleptomaniac wants to know as well."

Elder Sister Maid: "As I said earlier, our primary mission is to create the opportunity for a ceasefire on both the sides of the Demons and the Crusaders..... We'll deal with the Demon Army first, then the Human Crusaders later."

Mercenary Survivor: "What's our chances of success?"

Small Survivor: "That's the main question."

Elder Sister Maid: "It's present. It's small, but it's not zero."

Mercenary Survivor: "How?"

Elder Sister Maid: "We will remove the reason for the Crusaders to fight..... That's our foundation."

Small Survivor: "And how exactly will we do that!?"

Elder Sister Maid: "We'll have to use diplomacy and negotiations for that."

Mercenary Survivor: "Hmm....."

Disciple Nobleman: "Then, I will have to leave temporarily."

Resourceful Young Man: "Eh? What's that? Where are you going?"

Disciple Nobleman: "I'm headed to the largest commercial city, the City of the Gate. We will need information and supplies. And there's something I need to confirm as well."

Mercenary Survivor: "Well, it's true we will require backup."

Resourceful Young Man: "What's your real motive?"

Disciple Nobleman: "I want to take a bath. And it's about time to fall in love with a girl at a bar."

Elder Sister Maid: "....."

Mercenary Survivor: "....."

Small Survivor: "....."

Disciple Nobleman: “Well, I’ll do my mission as well as possible. But don’t worry. I have a meeting with someone as well.”

Mercenary Archer: “And how about us? Where are we going?”

Elder Sister Maid: “To the Dragon City. The capital city of the Dragons, a proud and ancient Tribe of the Demon World, located along the Inferno Mountains.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Inferno Mountains.....?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes. A treasure the Dragons have borrowed for the last ten thousand years.”

——- **The Holy Crusaders, Reinforcement Brigade, in Camp**

Singing, strumming.....

Disciple Bard: “Right, that’s the end.”

Spearman of Light: “Wow.”

Auxiliary of Light: “So what happened to the Hero and the Marshal after that?”

Disciple Bard: “Well, of course they downed a giant mug of beer together.”

Spearman of Light: “Oh I see.”

Auxiliary of Light: “All heroes seem to like doing these sorts of things.”

Disciple Bard: “Well it is said that it takes a hero to recognise another hero, so the Marshal is a Hero as well.”

Spearman of Light: “His Royal Highness even lives with us, he has to be the number one hero.”

Auxiliary of Light: “In order to save his frail elder brother, he obtained the blessings of the Church and led an army to victory.”

Spearman of Light: “With the blood of the Holy Empire coursing through his brains, he doesn’t just fight for his country, he fights for everybody. He’s a true inspiration to all of us.”

Disciple Bard: “I..... see. He sure did many things.”

Spearman of Light: “What’s up, Miss Bard?”

Disciple Bard: “No, nothing. — I don’t know much about heroes.”

Auxiliary of Light: “Well, they’re those head the fight.”

Disciple Bard: “.....?”

Spearman of Light: “They’re the people who shout ‘Attack!’ from the front, the real leaders; not like our commanders who just drink and eat meat..... right?”

Auxiliary of Light: “Exactly. They sit in their tents and complain all day.”

Disciple Bard: “Hehehehehe.”

Spearman of Light: “If you laugh too much, the commander’s troops will come and pick you up.”

Auxiliary of Light: “Touch wood! Touch wood!”

Disciple Bard: “Then, alright. Next, I’ll sing about the heroes I know. This one is known as the Black Tiger Prince. A general who commanded armies in four wars to protect the people.”

Spearman of Light: “Sounds like a great guy.”

Auxiliary of Light: “The best kind of guy.”

Strumming and singing.....

Disciple Bard: “A long time ago, in the knotted green sea of meadows, floating across the seven islands—“

——— **The New Territory of White Night, the Palace, the Study**

Crown Prince Marshal: “That’s the limiting factor.”

Strategist: “.....”

Holy Imperial General: “That’s right.”

Green Ash King: “It seems our views are in concord.”

Holy Imperial General: “The supplies of rations, the stores of ammunition, the throughput of supplies. It may take time, but we can’t continue to increase our forces at this rate without improving our logistics trains, or we will continue to operate at sub-optimal combat ability.”

Green Ash King: “To put it another way, this number is the limiting factor for the influence of the countries in the Central Continent.”

Accompanying Chaplain: “In that case, we have to leave right this instant without hesitation.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Report on the military strength.”

Strategist: “Total numbers are two hundred and forty-three thousand. The newly equipped infantry units formed from the conscripted serfs number two hundred thousand strong. Among this, the musket divisions comprise a hundred thousand soldiers. Of that, two hundred and fifty are equipped with the new model of flintlock

muskets. The remaining eighteen thousand are either spearmen or shield squads. Noble warriors count for three to five thousand, alongside ten thousand cavalry soldiers. Apart from this, there are also eighty thousand non-military accompanying elements.”

Holy Imperial General: “It’s hard to stomach there being so many non-military accompanying elements.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “I suppose so. They are mostly craftsmen, cuisiniers, prostitutes, and also merchants. Without these elements, regardless of the light and heavy equipment involved, we will not be able to maintain their morale.”

Strategist: “At the end of the day, the proportion of musketmen and spearmen is roughly the same as a combined arms army.”

Green Ash King: “And how are they deployed?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “The core infantry division is formed from twenty thousand soldiers.”

Strategist: “If we continue to remain mobilised in this territory without acting, we will only attrite our supplies. And if we stay put any longer, we will also need to make preparations to cope with the coming season of ice and snow.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Understood..... We move out.”

Strategist: “Yes!”

Holy Imperial General: “Yes!”

Green Ash King: “I’m itching to put my skills to good use.”

Accompanying Chaplain: “Your actions are surely a pleasure to the Spirit.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Leave five thousand in place as a garrison force. This port and the city itself are crucial supply support areas. Let the Kingdom of Falling Leaves take command of the garrison force, with a force of four thousand spearmen.”

Strategist: “Understood.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “And what are the view of His Holiness?”

Accompanying Chaplain: “Naturally, His Holiness is in agreement. His Holiness places his complete and utter trust in Your Royal Highness. Our loyal faithful are with us in the fight today, please try to minimise their casualties and look out for their safety.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Of course.”

Strategist: “I will convey your intentions to our units at once.”

Green Ash King: “We will hasten the equipping and communications link-up.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “In that case, let us embark. I will of course, take helm on our flagship, the *Majesty*!”

———— **The Kingdom of Winter, the Audience Chamber**

Running

Seneschal: “Your Majesty! Your Majesty!”

Lone Winter King: “What is it?”

Seneschal: “The Holy Crusaders garrisoned at the Kingdom of White Night have begun to mobilise! They’re loading up their ships and appear to be bound for the Polar Continent.”

Butler: “And so it begins.”

Lone Winter King: “It appears they intend to invade the Demon World.”

Butler: “I’m sure they have considered that it would be a needless attrition of their forces to direct their invasion at us. To begin with, if they decided to eliminate the Southern Kingdoms, countries like the Kingdom of the Lake would pivot to engage their vulnerable centre.”

Lone Winter King: “Hmm..... Send for a messenger!”

Messenger: “Your Majesty!”

Lone Winter King: “Inform the Consulate of the Kurultai immediately!”

Seneschal: “It seems the situation is about to change.”

Butler: “I suppose this is not unrelated to us.”

Lone Winter King: “We will also hold a conference for the Southern Alliance and discuss our reaction plan there.”

———— **The Holy Crusaders, the Cabin of the Imperial Flagship *Majesty***

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hahaha! What an interesting experience you have had.”

The Hero: “Ah. Well, it’s delicious! Demon pigs. Especially their rear end, it’s exceptionally succulent.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Is that so?”

The Hero: “Yeah. But it’s just a little troublesome to capture them. They used to congregate at near the pastures surrounding the Gate. But at this point, there isn’t a Gate anymore, just a large Portal.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “I have heard of this, but what do you know about it?”

The Hero: “What about?”

Crown Prince Marshal: "The circumstances regarding the destruction of the Gate."

The Hero: "Well, I heard that the Demons of the Pale had something to do with it."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Ahh, during that incident with the Kingdom of White Night?"

The Hero: "No, way before that. At that time, for some unknown need, they activated a Mass Destruction Spell to blast a hole in the Gate. The result is that the barrier between the Human and the Demon World was removed."

Crown Prince Marshal: "I see. I hear it's a splendid sight."

The Hero: "Well, it is magnificent..... Do you mind if I eat that?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "Please, help yourself."

The Hero: "Thank you."

Strategist: "..... What is going on?"

Holy Imperial General: "..... I don't know."

The Hero: "Hmm. The Automatons are a Tribe all decked out in plate armour, just like a knight, but somehow even with all that armour, they still aren't weighed down. With all their armour on, they can reach up to five times the size of a typical knight. And they easily have at least twice the protective power."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Hoho, I see, as to be expected from the Hero. You're completely familiar with even the most obscure parts of the Demon World."

The Hero: "I have just spent much time on the road."

Strategist: "Umm..... Your Royal Highness?"

Holy Imperial General: "This is.....?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "Oh, let me introduce him. This is the fabled, legendary, mythical person known as the Hero."

The Hero: "A pleasure to meet you, I am the Hero."

Strategist: "I appear to have met you somewhere before."

Holy Imperial General: "So you're still alive!"

Crown Prince Marshal: "Mmm, seems like you really fought with the Demon King."

The Hero: "That's right. It was a painful fight. I'm not sure what you've heard, but no matter how weak the Demon King was, the Demon King was still the Demon King. The moment I met him, I felt a tremendous (booby) aura."

Strategist: "Really..... the Demon King?"

Holy Imperial General: “Then it is as the rumours say.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Thankfully you still live.”

The Hero: “Actually, I also sustained heavy injuries under his hands, and was on the cusp of death. I almost did not ever open my eyes.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “And hearing tell of us Holy Crusaders, he has come to lend his aid.”

The Hero: “Yes, I hope you do not mind my burdening your mission for the time being.”

Strategist: “That’s.....”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Of course, this is the Hero, after all. Do you all not remember? He is the one who bore the will of the Expedition Against the Demon King, who bearing the blessings of the Church marched forth to save the world. I still remember standing on that balcony with all the other members of royalty, watching him march past. As his armour shined brilliantly, we could see that despite his young age, he bore an astounding chivalry and a heart steeled against the numerous dangers against him, truly the very image of a great hero.”

The Hero: “Surely you are exaggerating, hehehe.”

Strategist: (It is said that the Hero’s abilities are equivalent to a thousand heavily armoured knights. If this is true, then he may be an even greater asset than our muskets. Moreover, having spent much time in the Demon World, he has acute knowledge of the geography and the culture, and understanding of the Demons themselves. His joining us comes with myriad merits, but.....”

Holy Imperial General: “Then we shall be together for the time being.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Then it’s decided. Please arrange suitable lodgings for him.”

The Hero: “Oh, don’t trouble yourself. As long as it’s not flooded, I’m alright with sleeping in the brig if there is no space. As long as you make sure there’s enough food.”

Strategist: “I will see to the arrangements immediately.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Make sure there’s lots of food! The Hero is still recovering, it would be beneficial to his recovery to provide him with lots of good food and good wine.”

The Hero: “Thank you very much!”

———— **The Holy Crusaders, the Office of the Imperial Flagship *Majesty***

Door closes

Strategist: “I have seen to the Hero’s lodgings.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hmm.....”

Strategist: “Just what is the Hero plotting?”

Holy Imperial General: “Do you think he has a scheme?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “What do you mean?”

Holy Imperial General: “Before he left, in other words, roughly four to five years ago, I heard that the Hero was a highly broadminded individual, whose combat abilities were powerful enough that you could be assured of any operation he undertook, a peerless risk-taker with an almost child-like reverence of justice and righteousness.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “That is what I heard as well. But, now he seems different. It’s true that he’s just extricated himself from some dangerous straits, but he gave the impression of a person who has come to see the world as a calculation of gains and losses.”

Strategist: “What should we issue in our announcement for now?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “The Demons of the Demon World are powerful. There are many among them who are more vicious than the beasts of the Human World, or have special abilities and poisons. If we were to just go in like this, we would face numerous sacrifices. But with the Hero, a truly special individual, we should be able to avoid these sacrifices. If we didn’t have him as a guide, who could say what would happen.”

Strategist: “Hmm.”

Holy Imperial General: “If we were to believe what he says, there is no reason not to use him.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “That’s right. The Hero’s abilities are a threat as well.”

Strategist: “Moreover, if we were to believe him, then the Demon King has also recuperated. It would be wishful thinking for the Hero to recover, and the Demon King not to have recovered.”

Holy Imperial General: “That’s true.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “In order to defeat the Demon King, we have to accommodate the Hero.”

Strategist nods

Holy Imperial General: “That may be so, but the threat he poses is still a danger to us.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “An unknown threat so close to home is much more dangerous than a known one. We don’t have any methods to deal with him yet either. Until we do, it would be best to keep him somewhere manageable. Haha. Now that he has willingly given up his freedom, this may be the best method to keep his tail within our cage.”

Strategist: “If you put it that way, I have no words in rebuttal.”

Holy Imperial General: “Yes, it is as Your Royal Highness says.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “In a few days, we will arrive at the Polar Continent. After that, we will become winter troops. Have the watch on the ships sound an alarm when we are about to reach.”

Strategist: “Yes, I understand.”

Crown Prince Marshal: (Hero..... It’s true that we have no guard if the stories of his strength are true. But how are we to use his strength without swaying the utter conviction the people have in our abilities. Primarch, did you know of this?)

——— **The City of the Gate, the Nine Hills, the Construction Site of the Fortifications**

Disciple Engineer: “Alright, so it’s as I explained. Today we’ll be working on the northern defences. Please try to add your best to the team.”

Middle Aged Workman of the Pale: “Understood. We will move into place.”

Workman of the Pale: “””Understood!”””

Running

Middle Aged Merchant: “And how are things going?”

Disciple Engineer: “Oh, Merchant. We’ve made much progress. Work seems to have gotten faster.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Then what do you think of the budget?”

Disciple Engineer: “Thank you for providing the budget. Now I can pay our workmen. Now that they get paid, they’re a lot more motivated.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “This reason is as we have discussed before, but above all, Aide-de-Camp, the defences are our utmost priority.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Indeed, this— is truly an important thing.”

Disciple Engineer: “My princess.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Oh, you’ve come as well, princess?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Please don’t call me princess.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Hahahahaha.”

Disciple Engineer: “That being said, is it really alright for you to provide me with this budget?”

Aide-de-Camp: “Well, I don’t mind. We’ve all gathered here to strengthen the fortifications after all. Considering the food that they buy, along with all the other goods necessary for their living, we have actually managed to recoup much of the budget allocated to the construction.”

Disciple Engineer: “Is that so?”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Well, the situations of the Self-Governing Council and ourselves are very different.”

Aide-de-Camp: “That’s because the Self-Governing Council are not merchants. We have no need for saving so much money, in fact, if we save too much, it would be bad for the economy. We have to consider the public need.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “I thought I should show my face around the project.”

Disciple Engineer: “That’s right, the craftsmen are still talking about the last time you came around. It is a really important thing to be doing.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Wait, are those Demons of the Pale?”

Disciple Engineer: “Yeah. They’re joining us starting this week, three hundred of them. We received a letter of recommendation from the Kurultai.”

Aide-de-Camp: “How are they?”

Disciple Engineer: “They are hard workers. Disciplined as well. They’re extremely used to working in a group, and while proactive, do not take matters into their own hands needlessly.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “Hmm.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Yeah, indeed.”

Disciple Engineer: “But, on the other hand, they are extremely prideful. There’s an ancient saying: ‘The pride of the Pale extends beyond the Snow Leopard Mountains.’ They hate to lose to members of the other Tribes. Starting next week, the Tribe will mix with elements from other Tribes, and we’ll have to see what happens next.”

Middle Aged Merchant: “It would be difficult to monitor them personally.”

Disciple Engineer: “Definitely. We engineers have a lot of things on our plates.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Then, to ensure it all goes smoothly, I hope you will do your best.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Our general should be coming back soon. It seems that there are many issues to deal with in the Surface World.”

———— **The Border of the Subterranean World, the Crimson Plains**

The Hero: “Ha!”

Shing!

Soldier of Light: "Amazing!"

Musketeer of Light: "He cleaved that metal-skinned Demon into half!"

Porter: "Thank you!"

The Hero: "Come now. This place is just filled with Demons like that. If you carry on singing as you walk, you won't be able to avoid being attacked by them."

Soldier of Light: "Is that so?"

Musketeer of Light: "Thank you so much, Hero."

The Hero: "Hahaha. Then let's move together for the time being."

Prostitute: "How adorable!"

The Hero: "Uhh, well, I don't mean the stuff you do at night. I'm not really into such things."

Prostitute: "Hehehe. For saving us, I can promise you some service!"

Accompanying Chaplain: "....."

Soldier of Light: "What a hero!"

The Hero: "Hahaha. I definitely didn't fight for that reason. I fight for world peace."

Porter: "Hahahaha! What a handsome way of saying things!"

Crown Prince Marshal: "He's really become familiar with all of them."

Holy Imperial General: "Yeah."

Musketeer of Light: "Have you ever fired a musket?"

The Hero: "It's alright, I can shoot lightning."

Musketeer of Light: "Really? Muskets are strong, though."

Strategist: "Is it true that the Hero personally delivered his application to the Holy Imperial Knights' Retinue?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "Yes it is."

Holy Imperial General: "Eh?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "The Hero is a follower of the Spirit of Light. There are even those who say that the entire existence of the Hero is a blessing from the Spirit Himself. And we are entrusted him by the Church."

Holy Imperial General: "What are you thinking of?"

Strategist: “Do you mean the Hero’s power as a symbol?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “I believe we can see that the Church has already seen to that.”

Porter: “This is really heavy.”

The Hero: “What’s wrong with the horses?”

Porter: “The snow is too thick to travel through by horse, many of our adorable ponies have already collapsed.”

Farrier: “The healthy horses are all been ridden by the noblemen.”

The Hero: “Is that so?”

Holy Imperial General: “How should we reply?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Just reply according to the Hero’s will.”

Holy Imperial General: “Then.....”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Find somewhere to have dinner, even though we’re technically on a battlefield.”

Strategist: “Shall we find out what the Hero wants to say there?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “I’m sure the Patriarch is also eager for news from the Hero.”

——— **The City of the Gate, the Municipal Hall, the Self-Governing Council**

Aide-de-Camp: “If possible, I had hoped to avoid this, but it seems the Human armies draw closer and closer.”

Human Craftsman: “Is that so.....”

Fiend Merchant: “Human? Army?”

Beast Soldier: “I was the one who gave the report. The Humans have come with a strength of around 300,000.”

Human Elder: “Three hundred thousand!?”

Demon Lady: “Wha! What!? I’m sorry!”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Come now, this isn’t something you should apologising for.”

Demon Lady: “I mean, I’m..... sorry for startling you.”

Human Elder: “Oh no, it’s fine.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Please go on.”

Beast Soldier: “There are roughly three hundred thousand soldiers. That is roughly five to six times the population of the entire city.”

Human Elder: "What?"

Aide-de-Camp: "They are the Holy Crusaders. In other words, the ones who took control of the city the last time!"

Fiend Merchant: "Humans again! How many times do they want to invade our city!"

Demon Lady: "Ummmm."

Fire Dragon Lady: "I believe we need to come to an opinion from here on out."

Aide-de-Camp: "Yes."

Human Craftsman: "Opinion?"

Fiend Merchant: "Regarding the movements of the Humans in the City."

Beast Soldier: "Really?"

Demon Lady: ".....?"

Human Elder: "Many Humans sit on this Self-Governing Council. One-third of the population of the City are Humans. We must consider that there will be many Humans willing to defect to the Holy Crusaders if news of their impending arrival is spread."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Indeed."

Fiend Merchant: "In other words, traitors."

Beast Soldier: "....."

Fire Dragon Lady: "This City is the direct demesne of the Demon King. Moreover, the Humans of the City are not the slaves of the Demons, but rather free, independent and equal citizens of the City, right?"

Aide-de-Camp: "....."

Fiend Merchant: "....."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Then, it is their choice whether or not to defect, isn't it?"

Beast Soldier: "However, the result will be the release of intelligence to the enemy."

Aide-de-Camp: "This may be impertinent, but please let us return to the original topic. Where are the Holy Crusaders presently located?"

Beast Soldier: "They are currently encamped at the Crimson Plains adjacent to the Portal. They appear to be advancing to the Plains of Strange Cliffs."

Aide-de-Camp: "At what speed?"

Beast Soldier: "They're covering 12km everyday."

Human Elder: "At their rate of movement, they should reach in twelve to thirteen days."

Fire Dragon Lady: "I expect their speed will increase when the City is in sight."

Aide-de-Camp: "However, we cannot actually verify that the City of the Gate is their objective based on their current position. It is possible that they might change their route as well. Firstly, we should send a warning to the Fiends, the Dragons, the old territory of the Demons of the Pale and the Automatons as well. Are there any objections?"

Human Craftsman: "..... I don't think so."

Aide-de-Camp: "In that case, it's decided. Put it down in writing."

Demon Lady: "Yes." *Scribbles*

Fire Dragon Lady: "In any case, the invasion of the City is the highest possibility."

Aide-de-Camp: "Yeah. If you think about it realistically, there really isn't an alternative. All important supply routes in the area pass through the City, and it would only make sense for them to redeem what they lost in the Second Holy Crusades."

Human Craftsman: "....."

Human Merchant: "Truly a low-hanging fruit."

Beast Soldier: "The military power of the City is small. Even other cities of similar size have more military ability. At present, we have a detachment of one thousand security forces to maintain law and order. It's not a lot but we should be able to hold them for a while."

Human Craftsman: "....."

Aide-de-Camp: "..... Currently, our cavalry forces are being led here by our Great General."

Human Craftsman: "....."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Firstly, Human Elder. Please help us to understand the feelings of the citizens of the City. What do the Humans of the City of the Gate have to say?"

Human Elder: "That's right..... Hmm. Apart from the travelling merchants, most of the Humans in the City have no home to return to. Even though they live among Demons, it's probable that the citizens of the City have already come to identify themselves with it. It may be somewhat presumptuous, but right now..... it is a truly strong feeling. While the Holy Crusaders are campaigning on the platform of rescuing the captured Humans, in treating them as defectors, it's possible that they may be subjected to unjust abuse. Rather than being saved, they would at best be cast aside."

Fire Dragon Lady: "....."

Human Elder: "On the other hand, if they received information from the defected Humans, that would truly be absurd. That being said, the Humans in the City still bare

an extremely strong grudge against that Commander who used to head the City. They were the ones who were being betrayed by the Commander and the entire Human World, there are in fact many people who do not even consider themselves part of that world.”

Aide-de-Camp: “.....”

Human Craftsman: “But on the other hand, we’ve finally managed to establish contact with the Human World. Alongside serving as a vital trade route, it also has the capacity to revitalise both our worlds. It may have been a gradual process, but eventually we now have monthly or bimonthly caravans, and eventually we’ll have even more. We can even send letters to our families and children, compelling them to come to the City, and one day even having our bones buried here when we finally die. There are many craftsmen and merchants who have already made that decision. For me, to be able to live in a City where Demons and Humans live together in harmony, where we can trade ideas and information, to undergo commerce, is enough reason for me to wish to be buried here when I die. It doesn’t matter how the war goes, I am willing to dedicate everything I have to the City.”

Fiend Merchant: “I am of the same mind. It’s the same now as it was then. Even though the Humans conquered the City, they could never take our will away from us. As the vibrant City of Temples, the great trading city. There will never be a city which will surpass us.”

Beast Soldier: “But.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “What is there to but about. There are many who have been attracted to the rich and prosperous trade of the City. Previously, it was the Demon Tribes who painted the City with their blood, today the Humans have joined in the fracas.”

Demon Lady: “Umm.”

Human Elder: “What?”

Demon Lady: “Sorry.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Hurry up and spit it out.”

Demon Lady: “..... Looks like..... we’re definitely going to lose.”

Beast Soldier: “Just by common sense, it’s tough to fight against three hundred thousand with just one thousand five hundred men.”

Demon Lady: “That’s true.....”

Fiend Merchant: “..... So, do you even want to fight?”

Demon Lady: “Ah. No. It’s not such a ridiculous idea..... but”

Fire Dragon Lady: “.....”

Demon Lady: “Umm..... This is just me, but..... I don’t even know which Tribe I come from. I have skin as white as a Demon of the Pale, horns like a Dragon, eyes like a Tiger of the Beasts..... a mongrel with mixed blood from all the Tribes.....”

Fiend Merchant: “What are you trying to say?”

Demon Lady: “No, sorry. Sorry. It’s just that, I’m extremely happy to be a member of the Tribe of the Gate.....”

Human Elder: “.....”

Demon Lady: “More than my hometown, I see this as my home. This city..... is infinitely important to me.”

Human Elder: “Hmm.”

Beast Soldier: “We the Tribe of Beasts are a Tribe who value freedom over all else.”

Aide-de-Camp: “I see.”

Human Craftsman: “In that case, we have no choice.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “If possible, I would opt for another choice, but we will have to do whatever is necessary.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Is there an agreement?”

Human Craftsman: “.....”

Fiend Merchant: “.....”

Beast Soldier: “.....”

Human Elder: “.....”

Aide-de-Camp: “In that case, we the Self-Governing Council will not hide anything from the people, and declare our intentions in full. On top of this, we will accept all opinions on whether to fight, to surrender or to negotiate. The debate will take place for three days. There may be some who will escape during the debate period to defect to the Human Army, but there’s no choice.”

Beast Soldier: “I wouldn’t call that a robust plan, but it’ll do.”

Fiend Merchant: “Among the various Demon Tribes, there is something called loyalty. To leave one’s own Tribe and join the Tribe of the Gate, is currently the only way to be free of the pains of this loyalty.”

Human Elder: “We are not mongrels.”

Fire Dragon Lady nods

Aide-de-Camp: “Then we hope for earnest replies from everybody. They should all have the opportunity to choose their own fates.”

Human Craftsman: “We would never try to press their fates on them, or discard them. Whether to go, or to stay, is a decision we should all make together.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “We will go together, hand in hand.”

———— The Holy Crusaders, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Central Encampment, an Opulent Pavilion

Crown Prince Marshal: “Then, with the addition of the Hero to the Holy Crusaders, let’s give praise to the Hero. Let us raise a glass, to our brilliant victory in the field, and to our victorious homecoming. To victory!”

Strategist: “To victory!”

Holy Imperial General: “To victory!”

Green Ash King: “To victory!”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “To victory!”

The Primarch: “..... To the blessings of the Spirit.”

Cleric Master: “To our Light.”

The Hero: “How delicious!”

Crown Prince Marshal: “What a glutton, hahaha.”

Green Ash King: “Hmm, he’ll grow up one day.”

The Hero: “Ah. Sorry. For being such a glutton. Actually, the higher the level of your magical ability, the more food it takes to sustain the energy required for it.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hmm, how interesting.”

Strategist: “Hero. This is the famous grape wine produced in the Kingdom of the Mist.”

The Hero: “I’ll help myself, then!”

Holy Imperial General: “The battalion you see before you, compared to all other battalions, was bogged down in that bottomless swamp and faced a terrible ambush from the Demons. Without you, we would have suffered more than just low two-digit percentage casualties. We are truly grateful.”

The Hero: “No, no. The duty of a Hero is to protect everybody.”

The Primarch: “.....”

Cleric Master: “..... Your Holiness, could this young man be.....”

The Primarch: “.....”

The Hero: “Of course.” *Cough*

Crown Prince Marshal smiles

The Primarch: “——“

Green Ash King: “Moreover, we are very grateful for that.”

Strategist: “Ohh!”

Holy Imperial General: “That.”

Green Ash King: “Mmm. How did you call over that huge group of wild horses? It was almost magical, I had never seen anything like it before.”

The Hero: “That was the Demon Thrush.”

Strategist: “Thrush?”

The Hero: “Uhh. Ahh. I was unexpectedly informed that there was a herd of wild horses, and after that I relied on Hero magic. Those horses are wild, so they’re rather small, unlike your warhorses, but that’s sufficient for carrying loads, isn’t it?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “All the lords send their thanks.”

Strategist: “Indeed, with the horses, it’s become a lot easier to move things around.”

Holy Imperial General: “Casualty evacuation as well.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Your Holiness. Should you not also send some warm words to this Child of Light?”

The Primarch: “..... Hundred Paladins.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Yes, Your Holiness.”

The Primarch: “Send the Hero this cup.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Understood.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Hero, this cup is from His Holiness the Primarch.”

The Hero: “Umm.” *Heart beating*

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Well.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Aren’t you blessed, Hero?”

Holy Imperial General: “The Leader of the Hundred Paladins is widely known as the greatest beauty throughout the Continent.”

The Hero: “Umm, that was not my intention?”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Then.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Wow, there’s truly no space between you two.”

The Hero: “No, no, then I’ll help myself. Haha.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Allow me to fill your cup.”

The Primarch: “.....”

Crown Prince Marshal: (What, why is he so conflicted.....)

The Hero: “Ah, what a beautiful colour! Where is this wine from?”

Cleric Master: “This comes from the Holy Demesne of the Church, handpicked fruit by fruit by virgins to create this highest quality Amber Wine.”

The Hero: “What a luxurious drink!”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “This is the will of His Holiness.”

Crown Prince Marshal: (..... Is something wrong?)

The Hero: “I’ll have some more, then!” (*Spell of De-Toxification!*)

The Primarch: “.....”

The Hero: “Delicious!” *Glug, glug, glug*

Door opens

Chef: “Your Highness, I hope the wait was not too long.”

Strategist: “Mmm, we sure waited.”

The Hero: “Oh!”

Door opens

Chef: “Alright, please, Hero! This is truly extraordinary!”

The Hero: “Thank you, Chef! This looks splendid!”

Chef: “Oh no, it was nothing. It’s truly my honour! Here I have a platter of veal meatballs, which took the better part of a day to prepare. It took much effort, but the result is something delicious!”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Mmm? Are you acquainted with my chef?”

The Hero: “Oh no, a few days ago, by the river, I helped him out a bit when his condiments got wet.”

Strategist: “Is that so. Ahh! So that’s why you took a while longer to cross that frozen lake with us.”

Holy Imperial General: “And we are again indebted to the Hero’s great ability.”

Green Ash King: “Hmm.”

The Primarch: “..... Hero.”

The Hero: “Yes?”

The Primarch: “Your valour and sacrifice have truly won the favour of the Spirit.”

The Hero: “..... Is that so? That person always seems to be crying, though?”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “.....!?”

Cleric Master: “.....!”

The Hero: “No, sorry. And?”

The Primarch: “How about it, would you like to be consecrated?”

The Hero: (*small voice*) “Sorry. What’s a consecrate?”

Strategist: (*small voice*) “In this situation, it means being welcomed into the ranks of the saints.”

The Hero: “Ah. That’s impossible for me.”

Cleric Master: “.....!”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Hero, the proposal of His Holiness.”

The Hero: “No. Well, umm, I’m extremely grateful. I mean you’ve already said it, but. There’s lots of things I’m afraid of, but well. The divine approach is..... actually I already have a contract, so yeah.”

Cleric Master: “Then, how about we do it this way? Disregarding whether or not you accept this consecration, for the time being you should spend your nights at the pavilion of the Hundred Paladins. They say that you can purify your mind and your body by living in the sacred world of virgins.”

The Hero: “Whoa, is that an offer for a harem?”

Crown Prince Marshal: (To what extent is the Church willing to push him?)

The Hero: “That is truly tempting. Ehhh.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “We welcome you.”

The Hero: “But I must decline.”

Cleric Master: “Wherefore?”

The Hero: “No, look, well..... It’s because I’m a Hero, so I’m up to my neck in blood. I would really pollute such a sacred world if I were to commit these sorts of actions.”

Cleric Master: “For this, you need only plead for clemency from the pure Light.....”

The Hero: “Moreover, no matter what sorts of theories you come up with, I produce pollution in large quantities, right? Even if I cleanse myself right now, I will be bathed in blood again, and that will be a routine. It’s really not a load that can be washed away simply by vocally telling me that ‘my sins are washed away’. It’s that burning feeling in my heart, slippery and slimy, that regret from the smell of metal and the revelation of pain; only when I can get rid of that, then can I stand on my own two feet again.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “.....”

Crown Prince Marshal: (Hohoho, what an interesting sentiment.)

The Hero: “Well, apart from that, here, I have come today as a guest of the Crown Prince Marshal. I have a duty to finish the food

Crown Prince Marshal: “No, no.”

The Hero: “For this reason, I’ll have to turn down the consecration, but in truth, the Crown Prince Marshal is the one who deserves it. As for myself, I will be happy to sleep in the caravans with the craftsmen and the chefs. On that note, we have already discussed my sleeping arrangements with the Crown Prince Marshal, and those arrangements are good enough.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “My, my, how strong-willed. Truly the protector of the people.”

Strategist: (Strong-willed? No. How cunning. He made use of the opportunity to announce that he stood below both the Crown Prince Marshal and the Primarch..... Even though I’m sure His Royal Highness already knows.)

Green Ash King: “Hahaha. Miss Leader. It seems you have been rejected.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “All is as the Spirit wills it.”

Holy Imperial General: “The Hero sure has a lot of dignity.”

The Hero: “Oh no, I am just a man who is willing to work for good food. How could I compare to the pillars of justice, fighting for a peaceful world, the holy Crusaders.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “In that case, perhaps His Holiness will allow the matter to rest. Well, away from these trifling issues, Hero, your veal is getting cold.”

The Hero: “Oh. So it is! Your Royal Highness knows my heart all too well!”

Green Ash King: “In that case, allow me to join you.”

The Hero: “Come, let’s eat, let’s eat. The skin is very crispy.”

Cleric Master: “..... Tsk.”

——— **The Kingdom of Metal, the City of Metal, the Craftsmen Quarter**

Trader: "Hello!"

Ironsmith: "Hey, long time no see. It's been a few months."

Trader: "Indeed. It's been half a year."

Ironsmith: "..... Yeah, we haven't talked in a while."

Weapons Merchant: "If it isn't the Trader."

Trader: "How are things?"

Ironsmith: "I've been incredibly busy ever since that affair at the Plains of Scilla."

Trader: "Isn't that a good thing?"

Ironsmith: "Well, whenever we think of the heroes of the Plains of Scilla, it's truly a cause for celebration. Our work are the tools which protect these soldiers, we cannot afford to rest."

Weapons Merchant: "I see. I've rushed here to deliver armour plating as well."

Trader: "Where are the cavalry equipment from the Kingdom of Red Horses?"

Ironsmith: "They're in the warehouse out back."

Trader: "Ahh, I see."

Grass rustling

Ironsmith: "Oh."

Trader: "What is that?"

Ironsmith: "That's the entourage of the Iron Fist King."

Long live the King! Long live the King!

Long live the Iron Fist King!!

Weapons Merchant: "Haha. What a lot of people to be walking around like that."

Trader: "Hey, hey. Watch your mouth. That's the King, isn't he? If he were to hear you say that, you'd probably get thrown in jail, right?"

Weapons Merchant: "Is that so? In our country, we more or less saying whatever we want. Nobody's scared of that beardy old man."

Trader: "That's quite amazing."

Weapons Merchant: "We don't follow me because we're scared of him. We follow because we respect him."

Trader: "Respect, huh."

Ironsmith: "He may be a drunk old man, but he's managed to increase the population of the Kingdom of Metal by multiple times within the last five years. At present, the city even has thirty workshops. Taxation is not exactly light, but it all seems to be used for a good cause. The sound of hammers can be heard throughout the city."

Weapons Merchant: "I see. The weapons and defences created by us smiths in the Kingdom of Metal are also highly renown even throughout the Continent. On top of that, the ferocity and skill of our soldiers is also well-known..... It will be up to us to defend the Southern Alliance."

Ironsmith: "Yeah, that's right. Now we are no longer the mere lackeys of the Holy Empire. Those who live on the Southern border may do so with peace and security. We can till our own lands, and establish our own Kingdoms."

Weapons Merchant nods

Trader: "I see..... I am truly envious."

Ironsmith: "Why?"

Trader: "We traders have been wandering from Kingdom to Kingdom without a true place to live. Even though this is our own choice, some might say we are even worse off than serfs. I am truly envious that you have a country to call your own."

Ironsmith: "Is that so....."

Weapons Merchant: "What? In that case, you just need to apply to the Kingdom of Metal or the Kingdom of Winter."

Trader: "Eh?"

Weapons Merchant: "You're a trader, right? Any trader who has been regularly conducting business in the area for three years is eligible for assistance in opening their own store."

Trader: "For real?"

Ironsmith: "As I understand it, you just need to apply. Merchants are eligible for a loan to begin their store, and the first year is also tax-exempt. Well, that being said, without connections, it will be a challenge to set up a profitable business in the city."

Weapons Merchant: "You could always take up some small jobs for the guilds or go down to the villages to see what they need."

Trader: "But, how could I set up my own store? Would the country really support a person like me who doesn't know anybody!?"

Weapons Merchant: "You're not a person who doesn't know anybody. You've spent three years conducting business in the city, haven't you?"

Ironsmith: “Hahaha! That’s right. Once you set up your store, you can still conduct trade with the Kingdom of Red Horses, and we’ll help you out.”

Trader: “My, my. I’ve spent so long saving money as well. I could have saved a lot of effort.”

Weapons Merchant: “Come, let’s go into the guesthouse. We’ll have a drink. And how about lunch? We can share a table with the craftsmen and have some cold ale as well.”

Trader: “Thank you! In return, I will tell you the rumours I’ve heard in the Kingdom of Red Horses.”

Chapter 6, “Walking in Pain in the Endless World”

——— **The Holy Crusaders, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, Encampment, 24km from the City of the Gate**

Chaplain: “24km left before we reach our objective.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Yes.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Even without pushing ourselves, we should be able to establish our formation in front of the City within 10 days.”

Green Ash King: “That’s right.”

The Primarch: “..... With the Heart of the Holy Spirit, we can increase our speed, and commence the attack as soon as we arrive! With the full force of the devotees of the Holy Spirit, we can break the resistance of those evil Demons and raise the flag of the Holy Church over the City.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “With regards to that”

Chaplain: “As soon as we arrive at the City of the Gate, we, the great and mighty Holy Crusaders shall spare no time in pacifying the City. Do each of you find this arrangement acceptable?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Please wait.”

Chaplain: “What objections do you have?”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “This is an oracle!”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Please pause for a moment. There is a report.”

Holy Imperial Strategist: “Yes. We successfully set foot into the Demon World 10 days ago. As a result of this journey, our soldiers are at the limit of their fatigue. As it has taken more time than we expected, we currently do not even have two months worth of rations. Moreover, in this battle, we cannot forget even for an instant that the enemy have a limitless expanse of land to their rear. Our supply lines are based on the encampments we have made thus far. The logistics and security of the rations is slowing down the movement of our light and heavy infantry units, and hence it is a fact that the speed of our projection is limited by the need to ensure our supply lines do not become overstretched. Of course, if we can end the war in one simple strike..... No, let’s not talk about a single strike. If we can end it in two weeks, we should have no problems. ——— The City itself holds large amounts of food stocks, so we can resupply there. However, if we spend any more time than that, we will have to fall back.”

Chaplain: “So the Holy Crusaders are not the strongest?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “We are, if we make the appropriate preparations, and if we do not act with negligence or complacency. On the battlefield, the worst mistake a person could make would be to assume victory even if there was a nine out of ten chance of winning.”

Holy Imperial General: “I also believe we should act based on the circumstances we are confronted with.”

Green Ash King: “Hmm.....”

The Primarch: “Than you tell me.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Our forces will march to the front of the City, where we will establish a proper base encampment. If possible, we will prepare observation and defensive positions out of wood. From there, we will assess the surrounding terrain, and deploy in a formation which will maximise the firepower of our cannons, while giving the soldiers enough time for rest and recuperation. With successive artillery fire, we should be able to wear down the defensive fortifications of the City within a few days. Moreover, with the large sulphur mines of the Demons of the Pale, we should be able to produce our own saltpetre for this combat.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Saltpetre.....?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “It is an essential ingredient in gunpowder, which forms the backbone of our army’s strength.”

Green Ash King: “It is a fairly essential item.”

The Primarch: “Are we lacking in gunpowder?”

Holy Imperial Strategist: “If we our entire force of 300,000 Crusaders were to commit to the battle, we have enough stocks to last us for eight days.”

The Primarch: “That is not a problem. Surely we can take the City of the Gate within that time.”

Chaplain: “Let’s destroy the Demons within the next eight days then.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Definitely.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “However, that is completely impossible.”

Chaplain: “This is the will of His Holiness the Primarch. In other words, this is the will of the Spirit herself!”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Please consider this. We have not even managed to conquer the City of the Gate, which means we are only at the doorstep of the Demon World. For us to take the fight to the rest of the Demon World, we are going to need access to the sulphur reserves in the old territory of the Demons of the Pale, in other words, we need that saltpetre.”

Green Ash King: “Hmm.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Is saltpetre really that necessary? We are holy warriors blessed by the Spirit of the Light. Troop fatigue? With the sweet emotion of devotion and blessed faith, we can overcome all of that.”

The Primarch: “Hehehehe..... That’s what I don’t understand. — In front of us is the City of the Gate. With the Gate as an altar, we have our brave heroes as the key, and all we need to do is to hold on to that altar. Why do we need to capture the entire Demon World?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Huh?”

Holy Imperial Strategist: “According to the reports of our scouts, the City of the Gate is currently constructing a massive defensive fortification. They have drawn reinforcements from surrounding Demon Tribes and are preparing for our assault.”

Chaplain: “That is a good development, we now do not need to venture far to break the heart of the Demon resistance.”

Holy Imperial Strategist: “!”

Holy Imperial General: “— That’s.....”

Chaplain: “Huh?”

Holy Imperial General: “We, the Holy Crusaders, definitely have powerful military abilities, however pushing our soldiers to the very brink of their abilities is an exercise in futility. It’s true that we should be able to deliver a very strong single blow with all our forces, but do consider that there has never been a battle in which more than 100,000 soldiers have been committed in the entire history of mankind. It will likely be highly chaotic, and we cannot expect these peasant soldiers to be able to execute such coordinated formations. In the worst case scenario, our entire force could collapse.”

Chaplain: “.....”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Green Ash King?”

Green Ash King: “Yes.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Are you confident of your forces?”

Green Ash King: “Well, that’s why I’m the forward commander.”

Holy Imperial General: “Your Majesty!”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “You told me this slowly yesterday, right? The method of using the musket..... And that I could look forward to it, right?”

Green Ash King: “Well, I just said that you could leave it to me.”

Holy Imperial Strategist: (Did he just get won over?)

The Primarch: “But this is a problem, Crown Prince Marshal.)

Crown Prince Marshal: “Yeah, it really is.”

The Primarch: “Hmm. Hahahahahahaha. Are you a coward, Crown Prince Marshal?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “My orders are to support and protect the interests of Your Holiness and the Central Continent, to forever defend it’s lands and peoples. For this purpose, perhaps a little cowardice is appropriate too. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Holy Imperial Strategist: “..... Your Imperial Excellency.”

Green Ash King: “No, no. I’m sure we all understand how important the saltpetre is. While I cannot be sure about the Demon Army’s formations or people, I know that there are currently no more than 50,000 soldiers garrisoned in the City. To deal with them, even 200,000 would be more than enough.”

The Primarch: “.....”

Green Ash King: “Let’s split our forces into two parts. If we go by the book, a battle on two fronts is a terrible idea, but with our abilities, I believe we can pull it off. After dedicating some forces to the protection of our hinterland and our supply lines, we can maintain 180,000 of our forces on the alert. His Imperial Highness can then command 50,000 men to take control of the erstwhile territory of the Demons of the Pale. As His Imperial Highness said, it is a lightly defended area, hence we believe 50,000 soldiers should be sufficient. On top of that, I will command 150,000 soldiers to take control of the City of the Gate. I will request that all cannons be placed under our command. Like this, we should outnumber the Demons four to one. Or at worst, three to one. Still enough for us to trample over them..... What do you think?”

The Primarch: “Good. When the City of the Gate falls, perhaps we shall see the light.”

Chaplain: “..... Very good.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “I will be looking forward to it, Green Ash King. Hehehehe.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “.....”

Chaplain: “What do you think, Your Imperial Highness?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “I understand.”

Holy Imperial Strategist: “.....”

Green Ash King: “Tomorrow morning?”

The Primarch: “We will move out starting tomorrow. Our soldiers will need to march faster.”

Chaplain: “Holy Spirit bless us all.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “All is as the Spirit wills it.”

———— **The Kingdom of the Lake, the City of the Lake, the Headquarters of the Merchant’s Union**

Branch Chief: “Somehow it seems we’ve managed to deplete the stocks of charcoal for the secret workshops. They have begun to issue letters of appeal to surrounding Kingdoms, invoking the name of the Crown Prince Marshal to help them.”

The Young Merchant: “Letters of appeal, huh?”

Branch Chief: “They may be termed letters of appeal, but the content is basically a thinly veiled threat, you could really say that it’s a letter of demand.”

The Young Merchant: “Hmph. That should slow them down.”

Branch Chief: “That’s right. With this, the Holy Crusaders should suffer a significant shock to their supply stocks.”

The Young Merchant: “But it seems that this will not be enough.....”

Female Union Employee: “.....?”

Branch Chief: “Do you have something else planned?”

The Young Merchant: “How many cities does the Union have banks in?”

Female Union Employee: “Sixty four.”

The Young Merchant: “With the Southern Alliance as our heart, perhaps we might be able to expand this to a hundred or more.”

Branch Chief: “What are you planning?”

The Young Merchant: “The chief advantage of the Holy Church is their numbers.”

Union Employee: “Of adherents?”

The Young Merchant: “That’s part of it, but the amount of branches they have is immense as well. Support is of course materialised when they call for soldiers, but on the whole it’s a wide web that encompasses every single part of politics and the economy. I would call it a *network*.”

Union Employee: “I don’t understand.”

The Young Merchant: “In other words, the four cathedrals represent much more than just four works of architecture. In fact, one single cathedral could have five or six times as much influence as you think.”

Union Employee: “..... Hmm.”

The Young Merchant: “One very striking example would be *money orders*.”

Branch Chief: “Don’t tell me you intend to disrupt the money orders system!?”

The Young Merchant: “Yes.”

Branch Chief: “That is a very great risk.”

The Young Merchant: “Indeed it is.”

Union Employee: “What risk?”

The Young Merchant: “..... As you know, a money order is a means of transferring large sums of money from one place to another. Physically moving the money is liable to all kinds of risks like delays due to weather, piracy and banditry or any other sort of accident. A caravan laden with gold is the most perfect target for any robber around. The Union has invested lots of money just to hire bodyguards for our money caravans, and that creates the logistical problem of moving such a massive convoy.”

Female Union Employee: “Right.”

Branch Chief: “There are many ways of effecting money orders. For example, you could place a guarantee at one city of one hundred gold pieces and then move to another city and collect those hundred gold pieces from the same organisation..... Technically, the money doesn’t go anywhere, but that’s a money transfer. For this to work, you will need a lot of branches for your organisation, and you will also need to have large amounts of money so people can trust that the system will work. ——— At present, apart from shifting money between small towns and villages, the only one who has that ability is the Church.”

The Young Merchant: “The Church has been using their monopoly over money transfers to make large profits. In fact, it is one of the Church’s greatest sources of revenue.”

Union Employee: “The 10% levy?”

The Young Merchant: “That’s right. Using money orders currently on the market incurs a 10% levy which goes to the Church. It’s true that indenting mercenaries to protect the money conveyances which inevitably have to be used eventually is not cheap, but they still make a large profit at the end of the day.”

Female Union Employee: “I understand. Since the Union was displeased with this arrangement, we came up with our own independent banking system.”

Branch Chief: “It’s true that that was a consideration.”

The Young Merchant: “The issuing of money orders was originally the principal role of banks to begin with. It was not meant to be a system from which the Church can freely tax.”

Branch Chief: “But with the immense scale of the Church, if we were to confront them directly, we would only draw ire and attention to our existence we have so tirelessly worked to shroud and conceal.”

The Young Merchant: "Then let us make the maximum considerations. However, please try to think about it. At present, whether it's politically, militarily, or even culturally, the Continent is facing a tremendous shakeup. Every power throughout the land is now watching and waiting with an eagle eye for an opportunity to expand their lands. In the middle of all of this, the Primarch of the Holy Church has suddenly decided to leave the board? As players, we cannot possibly allow this opportunity to slip away from us."

Branch Chief: "Do we have a chance?"

The Young Merchant: "We do."

Explanation

Network: An economic concept by which many different parts providing directly unrelated goods or services combine to support each other and boost the efficiency of the whole. Being able to control or join the network enhances productivity.

———— The Kingdom of Ice, the Violet Audience Room

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Looks like you're so busy your eyes are starting to spin round and round. This many missives!"

Seneschal: "Yes, but I have to look through them all somehow."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "This letter..... 'The numbers of those infected with smallpox grow day on day, in these circumstances, it is almost as if the gates of burning hell themselves have opened. We plead to the Kingdom of Ice, to look upon your fellow human beings with eyes of compassion and to bestow of your medicine until my people.'"

Seneschal: "Yes..... It is a request."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "The Kingdom of Copper. How dare they? This is the country which produced those muskets which have massacred so many humans, just what sort of face is he making when he speaks of human compassion?"

Seneschal: "We've got his portrait, if you'd like. Our bards have managed to collect the portraits of most of the heads of state of the various countries."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Good, I haven't seen it. But I recall his face now. With a face like a frog, but the kind of frog that other frogs find ugly."

Seneschal: "Precisely."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Ah, and I expect the rest are of a similar nature."

Seneschal: "Indeed."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "I would like to help you, but."

Seneschal: "I will manage."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "What is this mountain over here?"

Seneschal: "It may resemble a mountain, but these are actually letters of appeal from the smaller villagers?"

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Why are all the letters in duplex?"

Seneschal: "All letters intended for the Kingdom of the Lake and the Kingdom of Branches also pass through here."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Eh?"

Seneschal: "I am certain Your Majesty knows that the Disciple Nobleman has been working hard to centralise our communication networks."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "It seems to me that this is becoming quite unnecessary."

Seneschal: "I see."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Umm..... *'hello your majesty, all the adults in our village have turned black and collapsed from smallpox. we also have no food, please save us. please.'*"

Seneschal: "Hmm. This comes from a village on the borders of the Kingdom of Waves."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "You must arrange for the Templars to deliver the vaccinations."

Seneschal: "No, please wait a moment."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Why?"

Seneschal: "There are many, many letters just like this one."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "But it doesn't take a lot of vaccines to save a small village from smallpox, and most of all, these little children are innocent, and we can save them. Why should we not lend them every possible assistance we can, is that what the Holy Order is preaching?"

Seneschal: "No, but these twenty-four letters, all written in the same manner, came to us through the consulate in the Port of Trout of the Kingdom of Waves."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Eh.....?"

Seneschal: "According to our consulate in the Port of Trout, the Queen Mother of the Kingdom of Waves has been using the tax-free privileges of the royalty to amass a massive personal treasury in order to enrich the prosperous merchant nobility."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "....."

Seneschal: "What will you do?"

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Send a medical task force to confirm the veracity of these reports personally."

Seneschal: "Yes..... It would be terrible if they were actually completely black."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Enough. And this?"

Seneschal: "Mmhmm. This is from the Kingdom of Boarshead."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Hmm. *'That the Kingdoms of the South should so selfishly monopolise supplies of the medicine granted by the blessings of the Spirit, is completely out of the question. If you do not wish to fall prey to the deadly pikes of our army of a million courageous holy devotees, you will send medicine post haste, along with every medical secret you have known to you and beg for forgiveness.'*"

Seneschal: "..... What a load of poof. With enough pipeweed, perhaps they might be able to materialise their million soldiers in their heads."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Throw this away. Yes. Do that. It's rubbish."

Seneschal: "Yes."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "So the only letters worth my attention are these five?"

Seneschal: "And I thought you were uninterested in matters of diplomacy?"

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "What should I do?"

Seneschal: "The Magic Guild of Magpies, what should I do about this?"

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "They are looking for a candidate, but I'll pass."

Seneschal: "Really?"

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "Yes. They want us to sell it to them for research purposes, right? I have no intention to trade the vaccination for money, and I have no gauge on their intentions."

Seneschal: "Then..... What of assistance to the Kingdom of Rice, and to the Free Cities?"

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "The Free Cities rely completely on the organisation of the shipping lanes used by the Merchant's Union, we'll see what they have to say about all this black gossip."

Seneschal: "I understand."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "With regards to the Kingdom of Rice, that is something I cannot decide on my own. I will have to refer that to the council of the Union. Let's keep this in view for now."

Seneschal: "I understand."

The Queen of Ice and Snow: "It seems that the news of a means against smallpox has come as quite a shock to the various countries..... We will have to handle this sensitively."

——— **The Kingdom of Metal, the Quarters of the Disciple Soldier**

Disciple Merchant: "Hey. Long time no see!"

Attendant: "I apologise for the intrusion."

Disciple Soldier: "How nice of you to come!"

Metal Lieutenant: "We'll have some hot pies and wine soon, but well, come this way."

Disciple Merchant: "Relax."

Attendant shuffles

Disciple Soldier: "Your small disciple seems to be getting really hungry."

Attendant: "That's not true?"

Disciple Soldier: "Please don't worry. When I was with our teacher, I was also hungry almost every day."

Metal Lieutenant: "Oh? So you went through such days as well?"

Disciple Merchant: "We endured a fair amount of pain every day. And on top of that, we were young. No matter how much we ate, we would always be hungry."

Disciple Soldier: "That's true..... Well, that's the life of a man."

Disciple Merchant: "Well, I suppose that is all in the past?"

Disciple Soldier: "I hope so."

Metal Lieutenant: "The Warrior-King of the Red Horses has arrived together with the High Prince of Branches. The Queen of the Lake and the Lords of the Free Cities will be arriving in a few days time."

Disciple Merchant: "Is that so?"

Attendant: "What a large conference."

Disciple Soldier: "Indeed."

Disciple Merchant: "Once you consider the context, it really makes your head hurt."

Attendant: "?"

Metal Lieutenant: "The Demon World..... The Subterranean World?"

Disciple Soldier: “What do I feel about it? Well, looking back at our financial situation, perhaps I should have opposed it more.”

Disciple Merchant: “.....”

Disciple Soldier: “On top of that, we’ve also got the Holy Crusades to the Demon World, which is apparently wielding the sword of all humanity. Even though there was a time when they would point their muskets at us, perhaps if we protested with reason, well, that’s not exactly likely but.....”

Disciple Merchant: “Nope.”

Disciple Soldier: “?”

Disciple Merchant: “My intention is for us to deploy our soldiers.”

Disciple Soldier: “What?”

Metal Lieutenant: “Really? Is that the collective decision of the Kingdom of Winter!?”

Disciple Merchant: “That’s not true. Our King, the Lone Winter King, merely said that he would think about it. It is my personal consideration that we should participate in this war.”

Disciple Soldier: “Why?”

Disciple Merchant: “Because I cannot think of anything else.”

Metal Lieutenant: “For.....?”

Disciple Merchant: “If the Crusaders were allowed to achieve a great victory, they would be able to extend their influence and power, and I have no idea if we will be able to put a stop to the spread of their power. What you must not forget is that the Southern Kingdoms have accepted the designation of heretic countries. For us to continue living, we have to ensure the balance of three powers — the Central Continent, the Demon World and ourselves in the Southern Alliance.”

Disciple Soldier: “..... Is that so.”

Disciple Merchant: “As such, I support our deployment. However, the appropriate conditions are harsh.”

Disciple Soldier: “How so?”

Disciple Merchant: “It will be very difficult to justify this war to our people. It is not a war of self-defence. In this situation, if we were to ask to people to bear this burden, I fear the chance of us fomenting open rebellion is not low. In order to prevent that, we have to come up with a proper justification. Moreover, as the Southern Alliance, our military power cannot be compared to that of the Central Kingdoms. It is crucial that we must settle the situation using our limited military force.”

Attendant: “War?”

Metal Lieutenant: “It would appear so.”

Disciple Merchant: “No, I believe that the wars of the past will be a poor strategy for us to adopt. It would be perfect if we could limit the scale of any conflict, and perhaps at the end, we could settle this with a simple bar scuffle.”

Disciple Soldier: “You’re talking in your sleep. The Holy Crusaders can simply invest massive amounts of money into crossing the Southern Frozen Sea. In which universe would they possibly agree to settling all of this with a bar scuffle?”

Disciple Merchant: “But we do not have the military forces to directly confront and suppress the three hundred thousand soldiers of the Holy Crusaders, do we?”

Disciple Soldier: “That’s true, but.....”

Disciple Merchant: “That’s why it’s difficult, so difficult, maybe we should give up on it.”

Attendant: “Yeah, the Disciple Merchant has not slept for days.”

Disciple Soldier: “Neither have I.”

Disciple Merchant: “Well, I do have some measures in mind.”

Disciple Soldier: “What?”

Disciple Merchant: “Have the Kingdom of Winter stockpile provisions which we require for long expeditions. Food, winter gear, pine resin, sleighs, charcoal, winter goats — that sort of thing.”

Attendant: “Ahem.”

Disciple Soldier: “How much?”

Disciple Merchant: “Enough for 50,000 men to be equipped for half a year of expeditions. Worth 3,000,000 gold pieces.”

Disciple Soldier: “!!”

Disciple Merchant: “Mostly, we will be able to share the burden of this. The Union seems to be receptive towards playing this game alongside us.”

Disciple Soldier: “With that alone—”

Disciple Merchant: “Our freedom of movement within the present lands has increased, hasn’t it? However, whatever I can do is still pitiable. I cannot command an army, and I do not know a method to check the ravages of this war.”

Attendant is stunned

Disciple Soldier: “—— That can’t be helped. We all have our limitations. Even His Majesty. Even the Female Paladin. On top of that, the Scholar and the Hero as well, probably.”

Disciple Merchant: “Indeed. My King also had something similar to say about this.”

Disciple Soldier: “I am a military man. Without explicit orders, I cannot simply march into the Subterranean World. However, I think.....”

Disciple Merchant: “?”

Disciple Soldier: “This is truly something important we should be worried about. I am worried. Hurry! We may not be able to make it! I seem to be hearing such whispers coming from somewhere distant and far away.”

Disciple Merchant: “.....”

Disciple Soldier: “I will go to this Conference as well.”

Disciple Merchant: “I see, I have also made plans to be there.”

Disciple Soldier: “We must do our utmost.”

Disciple Merchant: “Which isn’t very much. But I understand. I will support you.”

Disciple Soldier: “Thank you.”

——— The Kingdom of Metal, the Palace, the Conference of the Southern Alliance

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “—— Our Conference must focus on tackling the issues as highlighted before.”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “I see.”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “Mmm.”

The Queen of the Lake: “Definitely.”

The Prince of Branches: “I agree.”

Lord of a Free City: “I understand.....”

The King of Winter: “In that case, let me try to highlight each of our concerns. The Crusader army heading towards the Demon World numbers three hundred thousand. This is an unparalleled military force. Of course, victory and defeat on the battlefield is not a matter of numbers alone, however, it seems that the Demon World is about to face a truly frightening wind of destruction.”

Butler: “That is correct.”

Disciple Merchant: “.....”

Disciple Soldier: “.....”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “But, what do you expect us to do about that?”

The Prince of Branches: “To begin with, all we currently have is a Peace Agreement with the Demons, it’s not like we have a pact of mutual defence or anything. There is no basis for us to offer them any sort of assistance in this matter.”

The Queen of the Lake: “Exactly.”

Lord of a Free City: “However, following our agreement with the Demon World, I have reports which suggest that we are experiencing an economic upturn.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “That should not be ignored.”

The Prince of Branches: “To begin with, I have reason to doubt the veracity of these reports.”

Lord of a Free City: “I cannot ignore this allegation. Are you attempting to imply that you do not trust the research and information of the Free Cities!?”

The Prince of Branches: “That is not what I said. However, how can you say so easily that the increase in customs revenue may not arise from other sources? Of course, customs revenue has increased following the opening of the Demon World for trading and commerce. Our Principality can confirm this as well. However, at the same time, I can also say that the Crusaders have also been involved in preparing for war. As such, there is reasonable evidence to suggest that the increase in customs revenue, and hence the increase in trade and commerce may be a direct result of the war itself as well.”

Lord of a Free City: “That’s.....”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “Mmm. It has long been noticed that commerce increases in times of war. The Prince of Branches is very persuasive.....”

The Queen of the Lake: “.....”

Lord of a Free City: “However, this and that are—“

The Sage-King of Reeds: “We may have consolidated the strength of the South, but despite this, our people are still not very strong. Should we not be devoting ourselves to strengthening? For this purpose, somewhat ironically, the deployment of the Holy Crusaders is a great opportunity, is it not? I imagine that this is a thought many of the nobles have as well.”

Disciple Merchant: “Your Majesty.”

The Lone Winter King: “Hmm. It seems my financial minister has something to say.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “Mmmm.”

Disciple Merchant: “Dear representatives of the various countries, allow me to speak from an economic and financial standpoint when I speak of the deception that comes with imagining that war can bring economic vitality. Looking at the big picture, such a phenomenon does not exist.”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “Truly? Actually, isn’t this an ancient saying?”

The Prince of Branches: “What do you mean?”

Disciple Merchant: “Of course, within a limited time period, within a limited sector, such a phenomenon could occur. However, please consider this coolly. Any war of any sort requires the expenditure of resources. We will require food, weapons, clothing, winter gear, transportation equipment, fuel and firewood, other perishables, and now with the introduction of muskets, we will also require gunpowder as well. Musketballs are made of metal. And the smelting of all that ammunition requires double the consumption of charcoal. According to my estimations, producing four musketballs requires a total of one silver piece.”

The Prince of Branches: “And that’s why the economy gets a boost. By us demanding these resources, the economy gets paid for them.”

Disciple Merchant: “That is only true for a limited time period. Looking at it from the big picture, we are merely expending society’s wealth and resources within a war which creates no economic product. For example, if you bought four pigs, in two years you would have eight pigs. That is the idea behind increasing one’s wealth. Or, if five people worked to harvest grain, they would have enough to feed ten people. That is also economically viable. Compared to that, war is completely unproductive, isn’t it? Such a thing is impossible in war. In war you have to kill pigs to feed an army. Can dead pigs birth more pigs? Do the soldiers produce any tangible products?”

The Iron Fist King: “Hmm.”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “That’s true.”

Disciple Merchant: “Another thing to consider is what happens in the event that weakly related third-party provides the goods required to sustain war to the belligerent party. I believe you can understand this. I believe that war as an economic practice is out of the question, it is the rapid consumption of resources. As a result, we feel we can benefit from this alluring market while ensuring our country does not become a victim. In doing so, we create the phenomenon of a *War-Fueled Economic Boom**.”

The Prince of Branches: “That is indeed the situation in the Southern Alliance.”

Disciple Soldier: “.....”

The Prince of Branches: “As the war between the Central Continent and the Demon Army goes on, the Southern Alliance has been profiting from sales. We have received missives from the Kingdom of Copper, seeking to buy our charcoal, and other opportunities appear to be falling like autumn rain.”

Lord of a Free City: “..... But.”

Disciple Merchant: “That’s right. I cannot disagree with that.”

Disciple Soldier: “.....”

The Prince of Branches: “From an economic and customs collection standpoint, it appears that we can stand at the sidelines and still reap the benefits.”

The Lone Winter King: “But.”

Disciple Soldier: “Since when has the Southern Alliance become an outsider in this conflict? Have you forgotten how many of us fell at the Plains of Scilla to the muskets of the Crusaders? I do not mean that we should send our troops to seek revenge. But—to begin with, are we really the third party? Are we not a belligerent party merely not currently involved in the war? We are lucky that we are not currently under assault. That is why we can open such conferences. However, exactly who is guaranteeing our safety?”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “Hmm.”

Disciple Soldier: “Let us ignore the reasons why those muskets are not currently pointed at us. No, the fact is there are reasons, but those are related to the whims of the Central Kingdoms and the Church. The Demons of the Pale were an incredible challenge to our Three Kingdoms. During that period, there was a chance that our entire army could have been annihilated. However, at present the Holy Crusaders are twelve times there are number. This is not a mere military threat. This is a threat to all the people in the Southern Alliance; every single person from the old man sitting by his hearth, to the newborn baby. If only 25,000 Demons of the Pale nearly annihilated our entire army, it would not be difficult for 300,000 Holy Crusaders to purge the entirety of our lands.

I do not wish to exaggerate the threats we are facing, but I am a soldier. When I observe threats of such a nature, I cannot put them aside, I have to voice my concerns. I plead with each of you to reconsider. I understand that it will not be an easy decision to march to save the Demon Army, I ask that you put that aside and consider the true cost of this war.”

The Prince of Branches: “.....”

Disciple Merchant: “Right. I have just one more thing I would like to present to you all.”

Attendant: “Yes!”

Disciple Merchant: “Right, the present Holy Crusades is the furthest military expedition and also the largest scale expedition in the history of human warfare. Moreover, with the introduction of muskets, the present war has resulted in a never-before-seen sort of logistics expenditure. Musketmen are really just serfs who have undergone very short-term basic infantry training. For this reason, while it may be very cheap to raise large numbers of them as compared to knights and mercenaries, in reverse, as the war goes

on, they are prone to consuming large amounts of food and during the conflict itself, they expend huge amounts of gunpowder and ammunition. On to the next diagram.”

Attendant: “Yes!”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “!?”

The Prince of Branches: “What!?”

Disciple Merchant: “This is my projection of the logistical expenditure of the Holy Crusaders.”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “So.....”

Disciple Merchant: “Indeed. What an incredible expenditure. I myself have never seen such a large expenditure in any war, even though these are my predictions. In a month, they will expend three million gold pieces. These are taken as levies. If the war ends quickly, which is to say that the Crusaders are able to achieve complete victory within a month from now, the profit they will accumulate from taxes and dividends through the acquisition of Demon lands as well as compensation from the Demon Tribes may be sufficient to repay this. However, in the long term they will exhaust their available resources. Another thing to consider is that they may enact a military tax, just like they did eight generations ago in the Western Dynasty. This is an emergency measure aiming for a one time effect. However, in order to launch this campaign, it is a fact that they have taken productive male labourers from every country and drafted them into the musket corps of the Holy Crusaders. As a result, whether it be wheat farming, forestry or fishery, every agricultural domain will suffer a drop in productivity. Under these conditions, it will be impossible to sustain any regime of heavy taxation, and hence their abilities are limited.”

Disciple Soldier: “.....”

Disciple Merchant: “Of course, dead people don’t eat any food, but while expenditure on food may go down as the war goes on, that does not mean that expenditure as a whole decreases. Rather, increasing amounts will need to be spent on medical equipment and maintenance of general equipment. As a result, reducing the maintenance of the army may become the primary goal of the army itself. No matter what, an army is meant to fight, so basically an army which is not fighting is just pointlessly wasting food. In this situation, the war will most likely be turned against another target..... If you consider this, the situation I have just described will lead to our safety being in jeopardy.”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “In the long term, what do you feel is the chance that we will not be embroiled in this conflict?”

Disciple Merchant: “Zero. It is out of the question. We have accepted our designation as heretics after all.”

The Prince of Branches: “.....”

Lord of a Free City: “Then this is our annihilation?”

Disciple Merchant: “No, that is not true. While I feel our chance of not being involved in the conflict is zero, that does not mean that we are only limited to military means.”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “Then, what of our military means?”

Disciple Merchant: “Right.”

Disciple Soldier: “If we keep our head down, we can drain them of 30%.”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “30%.....”

Disciple Soldier: “But this refers to 30% of that immense treasury gathered from the countries enslaved to the Holy Empire and the Church.”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “This may be quite a one-sided view, but it is earnestly how I think. To begin with, our alliance is formed from us getting together to oppose the tyranny of the Central Continent, to oppose their domination. If we had intended to retreat, we would never have even joined in the first place.”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “.....”

The Queen of the Lake: “That’s right. If we search for a road which leads to our survival.”

The Lone Winter King: “What should we do, your Majesties?”

Disciple Merchant: “.....”

Disciple Soldier: “.....”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “But, three hundred thousand. Three hundred thousand? My wise rulers, please consider. Just what can we do against such numbers? We are no more than a flock of sheep before an enraged dragon.”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “We are not sheep.”

The Lone Winter King: “That’s right. We are humans. We are not blind sheep like the Church says.”

The Metal Fist King: “We the Kingdom of Metal believe that we should continue to debate whether or not to send soldiers to the Demon World. At the very least, we have been able to establish dialogue with a section of the Demon World. If we solve this through military means, while this may be appropriate now; in reverse, if we managed to solve this through dialogue, to the extent that our relationship will not be coloured by a backdrop of military affairs, I believe their ears may be more inclined to listen. Furthermore, we the Kingdom of Metal were one of those who stood on the stage and faced the assault of the Crusader musketeers. Some say that our enemies are the Demons, but it was those Demons who rescued us from the brink of defeat. I do not mean to dredge up old events, but we are not a country who will forget our benefactors. I believe the citizenry will understand this as well. Hence, our view is to send out the troops.”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “Our Kingdom shares the same view. We understand the threat posed by the Holy Crusaders. If we want to solve the issue, we have to act as soon as we possibly can.”

The Queen of Ice and Snow: “Unfortunately, my Kingdom is unable to support such a proposal. To begin with, we do not have the military force to support the operation. However, we also understand the threat posed by the Holy Crusaders. We suggest that we try to seek alternative methods.”

Lord of a Free City: “We choose to abstain. To begin with, as a free trading city, we do not have the ability to muster a military force. However, we have no intention of abandoning our present independence. We will do our best to provide naval transports, money and other material and logistics support as the situation deems necessary.”

The Queen of the Lake: “I see. I will consider the commitment of the Royal Knights of the Lake, as well as our Mage Battalions. Of course, we also aspire for a solution which will enable us to avoid conflict.”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “At present, my Kingdom does not have the capacity to commit troops. However, I may suggest that across the Southern Alliance, we can attempt to muster for volunteers. However, however..... What will we do after we gather our troops? Will we not only incense the Holy Crusaders, and jeopardise the fates of all our Kingdoms?”

The Lone Winter King: “..... That’s.”

Disciple Merchant: “.....”

The Lone Winter King: “The world which the Southern Alliance hopes for. Is not a world of consolidation and domination. What we hope for is peace and independence throughout the world. Within the South, we want freedom and liberty..... We cannot tolerate those who would challenge this conviction. From a practical point of view, we will not be able to prosper as long as there are those who would challenge our right to exist. If we allow those around us to be subsumed, we will ourselves be subsumed eventually, and we will be weak and epheremal.

The Scholar told me something I often think about and I believe this should be a beacon and a guide for the Kingdom of Winter and the Southern Alliance. That is, that ‘it will not end’.”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “It will not end.....”

The Lone Winter King: “Assuming that our Kingdoms are destroyed, but the earth is not. As long as the rivers and the mountains are still there, as long as the four seasons continue to rotate, then the people shall continue to reside in this land. They will live as they have lived..... Whether as citizens of a defeated country, or as citizens of a victorious country. As the Kingdoms change, they merely change rulers; as the Kingdoms stay the same, they merely transition to the next generation of rulers. As time

goes by, the world continues. Nothing ends. We should consider the fact that it will not end.”

Disciple Merchant: “It will not end.....”

The Lone Winter King: “That is correct. It may not be the best of circumstances. However, as a King, as a leader, I must make preparations for this. That is my conviction. I also believe that we must light the way for the Southern Alliance to advance. If the world is not going to end, then at the very least, to strive for a better tomorrow, we must continue to fight. Somehow or another, we will not end, and neither will the Central Continent, or the Demon World. An unending world where suffering and conflict are allowed to exist, to me that is something too dangerous to tolerate.

War is a bad thing. Especially because even war cannot end the world. It helps to spread misery and suffering across the world. However, I must look beyond what is good and what is bad, I must defend my country. To defend oneself, we sometimes have to do things that transcend binary morality. In order to minimise the damage to my country, the Kingdom of Winter is in favour of dispatching troops. But this must be done for the purpose of freeing our future from dark clouds. This mobilisation must be one pivot of a broader political settlement.”

The Queen of the Lake: “That may be so..... But the realistic problem is that the military force we are able to muster will never be able to defeat the 300,000 strong army of the Holy Crusadeers.”

The Lone Winter King: “That is why we must plan the scale of our involvement very carefully. For this, each of us knows our own countries best. We must research into what form of support and how many soldiers we will be able to provide to the expedition. I would like to request a preliminary report to be made available by this evening. As for the Commander-in-Chief, I would like to recommend the Iron Fist King. Does anyone oppose this?”

The Warrior-King of Red Horses: “It would be strange if you were to propose anybody else to helm our frontlines. I know him to be a meticulous and dedicated character.”

The Sage-King of Reeds: “I have no objections.”

The Prince of Branches: “The tales of his great heroism have been told for a very long time.”

Lord of a Free City: “Definitely no objections.”

Disciple Soldier: “So it seems we will be sending our troops out. I suppose I’ll have to head to the Demon World soon.”

Disciple Merchant: “Well, it’s not limited to just war. Of course, avoiding war would be the best strategy.”

Disciple Soldier: “That being said, how about our teacher? It would not be strange for her to join this council, actually.”

Disciple Merchant: “She may be of nobility, but she’s nobody’s retainer nor is she royalty. Don’t you think the effect of her words may be limited?”

Disciple Soldier: “Eh?”

Disciple Merchant: “Well, I’m off to see what I can do about the Holy Templars and the volunteers.”

———**The Foot of the Inferno Mountains**

Boots dragging

Small Mercenary: “What’s up?”

Mercenary Archer: “Well, ahead of us lies the Inferno Mountains. On top of the gate, the words ‘Clarity in Fire’ are written. Without a doubt, this mountain pass leads to the city of the Fire Dragons.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Good eye. You spotted that really quickly.”

Mercenary Archer: “Now the problem starts from now. The gate will no doubt be defended by guards, no matter how strong we think we are, we don’t have a chance. This is not the sort of place that a few tens of people will be able to break through.”

Small Mercenary: “What! You fool! How many lives do you think we will need to get past this?”

Mercenary Archer: “So what’s the plan?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I suppose we will need a cunning plan.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Hmm. Is it possible?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I think so.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Would you like to tell us?”

Elder Sister Maid: “No, I can’t really say.....”

Mercenary Survivor: “?”

——— **The Inferno Mountains, the Gate**

Dragon Guard: “Halt!”

Dragon Guard: “Who goes there! State your name!”

Elder Sister Maid: “Ahhh, ahem, it’s me.”

Dragon Guard: “Ah! Your Majesty!”

Dragon Guard: “What!?”

Dragon Guard: "There is no mistaking it. Your Majesty! I saw you with my own eyes at the Kurultai."

Mercenary Archer: "They're calling her the Demon King. So this is what the Demon King looks like. But she hasn't changed her look one bit!?"

Mercenary Survivor: "Wait, no..... What's that look?"

Small Mercenary: "So she was a mage!? Why didn't she say?"

Young Mercenary: "I'm not surprised. No matter what happens, I'm not surprised anymore."

Elder Sister Maid: "I have come to see the Fire Dragon Lord. This is a top secret and highly urgent affair."

Dragon Guard: "But who are those humans.....?"

Elder Sister Maid: "These are my bodyguards whom I have brought with me from the Human World. If possible, we will need a place to tend to their horses. The road has been long, and the horses need to rest. We still have a long journey ahead of us as well. Perhaps you know a place?"

Dragon Guard: "Yes, I understand. Hey, let's get her to the Fire Dragon Lord. And, look around for a place to house her imperial bodyguards."

Elder Sister Maid: "Thank you."

Mercenary Survivor: "Well done, milady..... I mean, your Majesty."

Elder Sister Maid: "Don't worry about it."

Dragon Guard: "Then, please come this way."

Elder Sister Maid: "Looks like we've solved it through dialogue. But if we hadn't, this could have been really troublesome."

——— **The Inferno Mountains, the Temple of Rubies, the Audience Chamber**

Dragon Guard: "This way, please."

Elder Sister Maid: "Thank you."

Dragon Guard: "My Lord! Fire Dragon Lord! The Demon King is here."

The Fire Dragon Lord: "Please come in."

Elder Sister Maid: "This is a confidential discussion. Please leave us."

Dragon Guard: "Yes, Your Majesty."

Door closes

Elder Sister Maid: “..... Phew.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Well.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I am please to meet you.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Who are you? You look just like the Demon King, but you stink of human.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes. I am a human. My name is the Elder Sister Maid.”

Bows

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Is this..... a Ring of Illusion?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Just why have you infiltrated this place?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Firstly, I must apologise for the method I have used to gain your audience.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Hmph.”

Elder Sister Maid: “..... You don’t seem surprised, and you don’t seem very angered.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Over the years I have gotten used to impolite uninvited guests. That includes the Hero, when he came barging in the last time.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I sincerely apologise.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “I suppose you learnt your manners from the Chief Maid.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes, she was my teacher.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “I see.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I learnt from the Chief Maid and the Demon King. You could say I was one of their disciples..... To begin with, I am not their official disciple, but I have had the opportunity of receiving their guidance.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Mmm.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I sincerely apologise for this, but the message of this audience which I have come to you for, is not based on the orders of the Demon King, nor is it based on any of her teachings, and I do not come with any official credentials. At present, I am operating in line with, but independently from the Demon King.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “So who or what do you work for?”

Elder Sister Maid: “My own ideals.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “I certainly hope so. Hahaha.”

Elder Sister Maid: “?”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “I may be pathetic, but I am the Fire Dragon Lord. I am the head of one of the Great Tribes in the Demon World, the Patriarch of the Four Dragon Races. It is important to keep in mind that my answers have quite some gravity.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Thank you very much.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Enough with the formalities. Once I am no longer interested in you, I may just decide to bite off and consume your head. So tell me, why have you come assuming the form of the Demon King.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I would like to borrow one of the treasures of the Tribe of Dragons. Well, there’s a good chance I won’t be able to return it, so I would like to have it.....”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Really? What do you want? The Blizzard Blade? Or the Ring of the Goddess?”

Elder Sister Maid: “The Ball of Light.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “!? How does a human know of that!”

Elder Sister Maid: “.....”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Answer me. This is a top level secret of the Dragon Tribe. This is one of the eternal treasures of the Tribe of Dragons. It goes back to the first Demon Kings, it is the foundation of legends. The reason why the Tribe of Dragons is such an ancient, such a noble, and such a powerful race has much to do with the Ball of Light.

I will tell you a legend. Once a King of Dragons had the misfortune of losing the Ball of Light. He went insane and died soon after. So do you think that this is one of those things which I can so easily lend out!?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Even so, please.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “So answer, how do you know of it, human!?”

Elder Sister Maid: “..... I saw it in a dream.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “A dream?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Indeed.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “This isn’t some euphemism is it?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Of a time long past.....”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “———“

Elder Sister Maid: “The Spirits were of five races. In later times, known as the Five Great Families. The ancestors of all Demons were these Spirits. The Spirits existed in a blissful utopia without conflict. Why did they fall from such great and noble heights to

become the Demons of today? That is because one of the families, the Earth Family, gave birth to something impure; and this incensed the Fire Family. This misfortune polluted the Spirit World, and it fractured into innumerable fragments like small crystal balls.

A lady of the head branch of the Fire Family offered her life to the heavens to save the suffering citizenry. She became known as the Spirit of Light, and the surviving Spirits she saved went on to become the seeds of the people today.

—— The Ball of Light is a present she left behind. But why? Why is it that while she is able to draw armies of adherents in the Human World, she is completely unknown in the Demon World? Moreover, why is it that the Church in the Surface World has the same scars of the legends as that of the Demon World? That person taught me this in the blue sea. As a human, I should have known. We humans are the descendants of that Earth Family which destroyed the utopia we used to live in. And the Demons are the descendants of the other families, who were saved by the Spirit of Light. As a result, your ancestors did not consider her to be a divine being. While she was recognised as being brave and courageous, that is completely different from being omnipotent..... She was merely seen as a great saviour, and a great and important person. That is why the Demon World does not venerate her. What probably began as great tales of admiration and gratitude, became legends..... and then myths.

However, in reverse, our ancestors did not have such forbearance. They could not endure the fact that they had themselves destroyed the utopia which they had held so dear. On top of that, they could not endure the fact that it had been a single young lady, not omnipotent nor omniscient, who had held back their transgressions and sacrificed her life for the world. As a result, in order to cope with all this, they began venerating her as a god.

However, as time went on, we began to forget all of these origins. Just as how one's tracks get obscured when the snow falls again. While there is still some element of regret and repentance, we had forgotten the pain we could not endure, and we had forgotten our eternal gratitude. It was not because anybody was evil, or that anything had been done wrongly, but in this way the Surface World and the Subterranean World started to diverge further and further into two very different paths.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “I have never heard a story like this.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Am I supposed to behave your creative license as a poet?”

Elder Sister Maid: “If possible. But it was not my purpose that you believe me so that you will lend me the Ball of Light.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Why, then?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Because it is a very sad thing for just one person to know.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Are you not afraid? Are you not scared to lose your life?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I’m scared. I’m terrified... I was born into poverty. I’ve felt the death brush against the nape of my neck countless times. I’ve spent thousands of nights hugging my knees for warmth as the snow fell around me, asking myself if, when night gave way to light in the morning, I would still be alive..... However, there is something I fear more than death.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “What is that?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Something even worse than death..... That is that the people I treasure, the places I treasure, the memories I hold dear, are crushed and destroyed, trodden on and annihilated. That is my conviction. I have no time to be afraid.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “And because of that, you want the treasure of the Dragons?”

Elder Sister Maid: “..... I think that ‘The Ball of Light’ is the remains of the memories of that woman. It may be a sacred treasure of the Dragon Tribe, but at the same time, I believe it is also a part of our transient universe. It is not a permanent object. I believe you know this as well. Impermanent objects will not last forever. In order to try to accomplish something, I would like to request for the Ball of Light before this happens. That’s why, please give it to me. I will use it. In order to let everybody in the Surface World remember, the Ball of Light is absolutely essential. So that we can stop spilling the blood of our own ‘family’.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “..... Perhaps what you are saying is true.”

Elder Sister Maid: “.....

The Fire Dragon Lord: “However, while your words may be persuasive, I have not yet been brought to an understanding. This is the territory of the Dragon Tribe, and I am the Khan of Dragons, the Fire Dragon Lord. As the ruler of an ancient race, I cannot so easily offer my trust to you. I have yet to see any concrete evidence that you are not acting against the interests of the Demon World.”

Elder Sister Maid: “..... But.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “At present, there are Human Armies thrusting the hand of conquest into the Demon World. Do you know of this?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “And with those small hands of yours, you hope to bring us peace?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Everybody enjoys speaking of dreams they have no hopes of attaining.”

Elder Sister Maid: “It is because there is a seed of hope growing in my chest.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Then, prove it to me.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Prove.....?”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “That military might is something powerful. Just you try and stop it. When I have seen you take heroic action on our side, I will make the decision whether or not to trust you. By that one action, I will confirm whether or not you have the qualities to hold the Ball of Light. They are a pack of hungry wolves, bloodthirsty and murderous. What can you hope to achieve standing before them? A little girl like yourself could never do anything. It would be best to give up.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I’ll do it.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Even if you go ahead and die, I won’t be fazed by such a simple act. It will take a lot more than strong language.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Once I prove it to you, I will seek your audience once again.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “I will not lend you any of my troops. You are to use whatever powers you possess and whatever friends you have to make that army retreat.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Thank you for your considerations.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “.....”

Elder Sister Maid: “You told me to make them ‘retreat’. ‘Kill’ was not actually part of it. So if I am capable of making them fall back without killing them, I would not be betraying your trust?”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “If you think it is possible to accomplish such daydreams, then yes, it will be within our arrangement.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes.” *Giggles*

Elder Sister Maid: “That is something I learnt from my teacher.”

The Fire Dragon Lord: “Talking to a lady like you really does make my eyes sparkle. Just like with the Demon King, I seem to be making interesting comrades and acquaintances at every turn. To think that these old bones would still experience this.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Another one of my teachers told me this. Think after you leap. If you think a lot, your fears will only increase, and you will find yourself unable to make the leap; however, if you make the leap, you will continue. My chest is brimming with thoughts of the treasure. So that that brilliant sparkle will never be clouded, I will not allow my feet to stop.”

———— The City of the Gate, Near the South Gate, the Emergency Military Conference

Aide-de-Camp: “At present, the Holy Crusaders are encamped just eighteen kilometres from this location, at the earliest, they may strike at us the day after next. This is an

incredibly massive force, so we do not have the specifics, but we believe they have two hundred thousand strong soldiers.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “Two hundred thousand.....”

Banshee Consul: “Hearing it once again really leaves one feeling overwhelmed.”

Beast Soldier: “However, based on the reports of several of our scouts, they have split into two forces moving in different directions. Their strength is massive, and their encampment is almost the size of our entire city, so it is difficult to ascertain.”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “We can’t just fold our arms and look on passively.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “Indeed.”

Aide-de-Camp: “..... I apologise. My Khans.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “This City is a treasure of the Demon World. There is no need to apologise.”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “If the City were to fall, it would be a simple matter to follow the course of the river, taking down the numerous trading cities along the way, and trampling over the territories of the Tribe of Fiends. This is our fight to protect ourselves as well.”

Minister: “We have just received word, the heavy infantry unit from the Tribe of Dragons has just arrived.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Understood. Allow them to rest.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “But, we have but.....”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “No more than sixty thousand in total.”

Aide-de-Camp: “While the Khans were not around, we have received an increase in the number of Beasts willing to join us in this battle. However, the total number is still not as high as we had hoped.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “We no longer have any choice. At least, we have large stocks of supplies and advantageous terrain.”

Banshee Consul: “As I thought, we should sally out and fight.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Hmm.....”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “Well. I have heard that the City has recently constructed new fortifications, however, considering that these fortifications have never even once been battle tested, I do not know how to place my confidence in them. Moreover, according to our reports, most of the Human army is not made out of regular soldiers. Especially when engaged in close quarters, their discipline is likely to devolve into chaos. If we consider this, our best chance may be to defeat them on the field.”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “I have gathered all the talented mages from the Tribe of the Fiends to form a Magic Brigade. I believe that the Human World is yet inexperienced in defending against the battle tactics of magical combat. If we make use of this vulnerability to cause chaos, we can disrupt their numbers.”

Aide-de-Camp: “However, the Crusaders possess the musket, a weapon even the Demon King is afraid of.....”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “It’s not that I do not understand the concerns of the Aide-de-Camp, but no matter how threatening these muskets may be, they are still experimental weapons without properly formed doctrines. No matter what, as the numerically inferior force, it is our priority to reduce our disadvantage.”

Banshee Consul: “Indeed. If we can reduce the enemy strength by a few thousand, we may be able to seize an opportunity for victory.”

Beast Soldier nods

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “What sort of formation should e adopt?”

Aide-de-Camp: “Right.....”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “That’s tough.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Here are the Eastern Fortifications which we used previously. I am not suggesting that we hide within the fortifications, however, the surrounding terrain is easy to defend and there are numerous protective trenches. We can use the Fortification as a centre for an ambush. I would like to rely on the Fiends and the Magic Brigade for this purpose.”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “Hmm.”

Aide-de-Camp: “On the other hand, for the formation dispatching frmo the South Gate, the centre should be entrusted to the Army of Banshees, the right wing can be formed from the Tribe of Beasts, while the left wing should be taken by the mixed force from the Tribes of Dragons, Humans and Giants. The formation can be set one and a half kilometres from the city, where we should be able to softly absorb the enemy’s main thrust.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “Softly?”

Aide-de-Camp: “We will force their centre to a retreat. This time, our intention is to fully exploit the enemy’s weaknesses. If their commander is not prudent, with such low quality of troops, they m ay easily scatter. If we are able to absorb their attack in this way, we can engage the enemy forces at the centre for a protracted time. There, the Magic Brigade can concentrate their attack at the back of the front wave, causing anarchy and chaos. By biting off the enemy’s overstretched frontlines, we can decrease their numbers. If any trouble occurs, or if the enemy firepower is too strong, we can retreat inside the city gates. Beast Soldier.”

Beast Soldier: "Yes."

Aide-de-Camp: "Please canvass for volunteers to serve as the heart of our Defensive Unit. If we are forced to a retreat, we will require covering fire from the City. These volunteer militia will not be dispatched to the frontlines, of course."

Beast Soldier: "of course."

Aide-de-Camp: "What do you think of this formation?"

Banshee Consul: "Seems like it might work."

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: "Yeah, if we can successfully bite off ten thousand of them, we might have a chance against the Human Crusaders."

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: "I wonder if things will be so simple."

Beast Soldier: "....."

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: "However, there is no room for retreat."

Aide-de-Camp: "Yes."

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: "Hmm."

Aide-de-Camp: "It seems that the decisive battle will be fought the day after tomorrow. There must be couriers desperately running throughout the entire Demon World. The Demon King, who has seen the Human World, the Silver Tiger Lord and even our dirty old Commander are surely not doing nothing and watching us passively."

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: "That's right."

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends nods

Aide-de-Camp: "Let us focus on surviving the battle we have before us."

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: "I hope so."

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: "The City of the Gate is now under the protection of the Tribe of Fiends and the Tribe of Banshees."

——— The City of the Gate, the Encampment of the Holy Crusader Surrounding the City

Disciple Bard: (I'm finally here. I've come back.)

Disciple Bard: (We've crossed the bridge built by the Disciple Engineer. From here to the City of the Gate is just another one or two days more..... If I were to leave the formation now, I should have no issue sneaking away in the dead of the night. This is already the Demon World. With the protection of the Spirits, this is the land of us Fairies."

Disciple Bard: (However.....”

“Hey, how is it?”

“Almost time. The battle’s about to start.....”

“It’s time to show those bastards who have betrayed the Holy Spirit.”

“Finally, I can go home.....”

“Yeah..... I’d love to finally eat some good food.”

Disciple Bard: (.....)

Spearman of Light: “Miss Bard, are you alright?”

Disciple Bard: “Eh?”

Spearman of Light: “Are you alright? You were staring into space.”

Disciple Bard: “Ah. No. I was just day dreaming.”

Spearman of Light: “That would be good.”

Miss Bard, you are not a soldier, so you should probably head to the rear once the battle gets started.”

Spearman of Light: “That’s right. Even though it’s thanks to your encouragements that we’ve all managed to make it this far together, this is a really dangerous place for a young bard to be in.”

Auxiliary of Light: “That’s right.”

Disciple Bard: “No..... That’s.....”

“What’s for today?”

“Bean soup and black bread.”

“Ahhh, I sure would love some bread without sand in it.”

“Endure!”

“I want to eat porridge with milk.”

“Don’t complain, at least we have something to eat.”

Auxiliary of Light: “Oh that’s right, I’ve been carrying it with me all this while, but how about we share some cheese.”

Spearman of Light: “Ah! I have also got some wheat with me.”

Disciple Bard: “There’s no way I could accept!”

Spearman of Light: “No, umm. Umm. It seems that we will be dispatched to the vanguard wave. We didn’t know that before.”

Auxiliary of Light: “Yeah. So, since we’re going there, they gave us just a little more food.”

Disciple Bard: “But, then—”

Spearman of Light: “We’ve heard a lot of beautiful things from you.”

Auxiliary of Light: “Yeah, you’ve really shown that to us.”

Disciple Bard: “..... Ah, ah.”

Spearman of Light: “?”

Disciple Bard: (Everyone, even though they’re going to die..... Even though they are going to stain these blue sands in a sea of red blood. Why is it that my songs, cannot..... reach anyone.....)

Spearman of Light: “What’s wrong?”

Disciple Bard: “..... Nothing.”

Spearman of Light: “Please stop crying, Miss Bard.”

Auxiliary of Light: “That’s right, you can’t cry.”

Disciple Bard: (Even. Even though they’re so close, why are they so far? Why..... Why..... Why can’t I touch them?)

Spearman of Light: “Miss Bard?”

Auxiliary of Light: “Come we’ve got to get a move on.”

Disciple Bard: “No..... Thank you..... I.....”

Spearman of Light: “Yeah.....”

Disciple Bard: “I cannot fight, but, I will watch to the end.”

Auxiliary of Light: “You will watch us?”

Disciple Bard: “I will watch to the end. To the end.....”

———— **The Demon World, the South, a Gusty Wasteland, the Central Encampment**

The Crown Prince Marshal: “Hmm.”

Strategist: “What is it, Your Imperial Highness?”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “No. It’s almost time for the main unit to commence their envelopment of the City.”

Strategist: “Indeed it is.”

Holy Imperial General: “How will that fare?”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “Ahaha.”

Strategist: “?”

Holy Imperial General: “What is it?”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “No, it’s just that, even if this decisive battle were to go well, or were to awry, it would not have a tremendous impact.”

Holy Imperial General: “Is that so?”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “Of course, if we suffer a defeat, the conquest of the Demon World would be largely set back, but just what does defeat refer to in this case? Of course, if the entire force of a hundred and fifty thousand were to be completely wiped out, that would be a defeat; but what if we had seventy thousand remaining.”

Strategist: “It is impossible to conquer the Demon World with just seventy thousand.”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “Then what of it? If the City of the Gate were to fall, would that seventy thousand plus the elite thirty thousand I know control be sufficient? We could capture the City of the Gate, leave them as a garrison force and return to the Continent. ——— We would not have lost anything. Is that not sufficient?”

Holy Imperial General: “Not lost anything?”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “To begin with, we are outside our borders. This is not the Continent. While we may lose men, we will never lose territory. If I were to build a strong bridgehead here in the Demon World, we can slowly carve out the territory like slices of a cake. This may take some time, but that is not actually an issue.”

Strategist: “Indeed.”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “To begin with, our minimal goals were to defend the Continental territories of the Human World to the death and construct the foundations of the Thousand Year Empire. The Central Continent could become a unified political entity centred around the Holy Empire. We are fighting against heretics against this idea, the Demon Race. In the end, we will no doubt have ended on a much higher note than we began, and hence this would not have been a pointless war. And now, we have illuminated the presence of the Demon World, and cast them as a diametrically oppositional threat, regardless of the actual conflict itself, we the Holy Empire now have much more persuasive power.

This means that controlling territory in the Demon World is not actually a requirement. No, subjugation and control can be effectively carried out once the Holy Empire is the centre of the world. To begin with, the next priority is to deal with the Southern

Alliance. However, in order to deal with the Southern Alliance, we need to invoke the Demon World to solidify and build up the support for the actions of the Church.”

Strategist: “The Church?”

Holy Imperial General: “In recent times, they have truly become a thorn in our side.”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “Indeed.”

Holy Imperial General: “What is Your Imperial Highness’ thoughts on this matter.”

Holy Imperial General: “Hmm..... The Holy Empire, the Central Kingdoms, no, the entire Continent and all its people are bound by the chains of faith to the Spirit of Light. Alone we are quite powerful, but with this we are massive. This Holy Crusades is a testament to that. The magnificent power of the musket, this pace of training and development; in other words, the fact that we were so cheaply able to convert serfs into a credible fighting force on the battlefield, is all due to the faith generated by the Church. Without a single set of teachings to unite us, the Kingdoms would be torn apart by ‘freedom-motivated conscripts’ or some other chaotically inspired groups. The Church is vital and important, and it is keeping our lives.”

Holy Imperial General: “So the Church is on the side of justice.....?”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “Justice? That has nothing to do with it. It is just like a rock.”

Holy Imperial General: “A rock?”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “Even a rock sitting on a road side can become a divine object if everybody bows their head in its direction, right? If you polish it, it can shine; if you carve it, you can make it into the figurine of a person. Faith is nothing more than the polishing of habits, as one would polish a rock. Such things are even seen in a children’s games. — What the Church really is, is ‘time’.”

The Crown Prince Marshal: “Or you could say, the length of a prayer. History, as it is built and compiled, is the backdrop of the true nature of the Church. Thousands of years, hundreds of years of history have been interpreted by the Church as right or wrong. Justice is the act of separating superficial conflicts from the tendency of situations, in other words, propriety. If things are done for a right reason, then of course, people will be able to feel the roots of the argument. That is Justice. — So, just where is the source of this propriety? If you asked me, that is ‘time’. Or you could also call it history. Standing at the present day, the older things are, the more right they seem. Quite simply, the longer things continue, the more right they are. Because it is ancient, it is proper. And the defence and maintenance of this propriety is to the gross benefit of us in the Holy Empire..... The Thousand Year Empire is not just a utopia we see when we close our eyes. If we are one day able to control what is proper and what is not, that will be our compass to the truth.”

Chapter 7, “I am the Fearsome General of the Right of the Demon World.”

——— **The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Holy Crusaders**

Crunch! Crunch! Crunch!

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “We can see it! Advance! Advance! Children of Light!”

Accompanying Chaplain: “There! Our target is the City of the Gate!”

The Ash Green King: “Centre muskets! Maintain your formations!”

Musketmen of Light shuffle

“All is as the Spirit wills it!”

“All is as the Spirit wills it!”

“All is as the Spirit wills it!”

Spearman of Light: “For the sake of His Holiness!”

Sergeant of Light: “Long live the Holy Spirit of Light!”

Light Infantry of Light: “Long live the Holy Spirit!”

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “The enemy is right ahead of us, deployed in a square formation.”

The Ash Green King: “Hmm. The centre is comprised of infantry, the left wing of scattered light infantry. And the right wing..... Is that a giant?”

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “A giant..... Hehe, what shall we do about that?”

The Ash Green King: “It’s not like he’s as massive as a mountain. He’s just a few times bigger than a normal person at most. He would be a splendid target for our cannon.”

March, march, march

Sergeant of Light: “Advance! Advance! The enemy is straight ahead!”

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Now we shall see their skill.”

The Ash Green King: “Let us sing of victory. Load muskets! Advance!”

——— **The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Demon Army**

Agggghhhhhhhhhhhhh!!

Aide-de-Camp: "They have come."

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: "Mmm. I'm counting on you."

Banshee Lieutenant: "The Crusaders have come! Warriors of the Banshees!"

Swordman of Banshees: "Yeah!"

Spearman of Banshees: "Let's do this!"

Banshee Lieutenant: "I know just how fierce you guys can be! The enemy advance will be brutal and intense, but we have to halt it. We will not be fazed by their impertinent muskets! For the pride of the Tribe of Banshees!"

Spearman of Banshees: "Let's go."

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: "We are all relying on you."

Banshee Lieutenant: "Leave it to us!"

Aghhhhhhhhhh!

Aide-de-Camp: "They draw close."

Heavy Infantry of Dragons: "The humans are here."

Javelinman of Giants: "Yes..... They come....."

Aide-de-Camp: "It's finally about to begin. Ready! Giants, begin throwing javelins. We will rain javelins on them from this position."

———— The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Holy Crusaders

Grass blows in the wind

The Ash Green King: "Here we are."

Knight of the Kingdom of Mist: "Now it begins."

The Ash Green King: "Mmm. ——— Centre First Company! Advance! Fire upon contact with the enemy! Move out!"

Musketman of Light: "Aghhhhh!"

Spearman of Light: "Advance! Advance!"

Sergeant of Light: "All is as the Spirit wills it!"

The Ash Green King: "Centre Second Company! Load muskets! Upon First Company's contact with the enemy, you will be next to fire!"

Sergeant of Light: "Move out, do not be late!"

Light Infantry of Light: "Destroy the Demon Race!"

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: "The City of the Gate will be ours!"

Attendant Chaplain: "By the Grace of the Holy Spirit!"

The Ash Green King: "The Spirit? The deciding factors on the battlefield are cold steel and raging fires."

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Knight of the Kingdom of Mist: "First Company has made contact with the enemy!"

The Ash Green King: "Centre Second Company! Begin your advance! Do not allow the ground taken by First Company to be eaten up by the enemy! Spearmen to the centre to protect the muskets! Attack! Move out!"

Musketman of Light: "Aggggghhhhhhhhh!"

"All is as the Spirit wills it!"

"All is as the Spirit wills it!"

"All is as the Spirit wills it!"

Sergeant of Light: "Second Company will take this victory!"

——— The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Demon Army

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: "Here they come."

Banshee Lieutenant: "Draw your swords! Warriors, advance! Attack!"

Swordman of Banshees: "Aghhhh!"

Spearman of Banshees: "Attack!"

Aide-de-Camp: "I will go as well. The aim of the muskets is not very good. Keep your aim at their centre line. There!"

Javelinman of Giants: "Leave it to us....."

Whoosh whoosh

Auxiliary of Beasts: "Let's go as well. The Right Wing feasts today!"

Skirmisher of Beasts: "Attack! Attack!"

Crack! Crack!

Banshee Lieutenant: "!?"

“Aghhhhh!!!” “What..... what.....”

Swordman of Banshees: “Have no fear! Attack! Attack!”

Spearman of Banshees: “Warriors of the Tribe of Banshees! Advance!”

Javelinman of Giants: “Here we go.....” *Whoosh*

Aide-de-Camp: “Incredible. So this is power of the muskets.....”

“Advance!”

“All is as the Spirit wills it!”

“All is as the Spirit wills it!”

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Aide-de-Camp: “What? A second volley!? That’s too quick!”

——— The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the East Fortifications, the Army of Fiends

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “..... We Fiends should move out too.”

Magic Brigade Commander: “Understood. Let’s go.”

Fiend Mage: “Yes!”

Knight of Fiends: “Line up, we will take the fighting force of the Holy Crusaders along their side.”

Spearman of Fiends: “Understood!”

Crack! Crack!

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “It has begun. Magic Brigade, commence!”

Magic Brigade Commander: “Yes! Begin the Spell of Double Illusions!”

Fiend Mage: “Spell of Double Illusions!”

Fiend Mage: “Spell of the Illusionary Dream Mirror!”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “Knights! An illusionary spell has just been cast upon you. Right now, your bodies seem thin and pressed to the enemy, like innumerable mirrors, they will have no way to determine each of you from the other. The enemy’s new weapon, the musket, is a projectile weapon. As a result, since they won’t be able to aim at you, the effectiveness will be greatly lowered. We will use a mounted charge to crush their formation! We will bite off their advancing unit, and in the chaotic fray, extract ourselves back to the City of the Gate.”

Knight of Fiends: “Understood!”

Spearman of Fiends: "For our homes!"

———— **The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Holy Crusaders**

Knight of the Kingdom of Mist: "Enemy ambush from the left wing. It seems they intend to split us up with an attack."

The Ash Green King: "So it would seem."

Knight of the Kingdom of Mist: "The enemy is using some sort of illusionary magic, but they appear to be mounted cavalymen."

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: "Your Majesty, is the situation against our favour?"

The Ash Green King: "Of course not. It is all as expected. Let them taste the power of the muskets and their overwhelming numerical inferiority. Commander of the Left! Load muskets!"

Light Infantry of Light: "Take aim!"

Light Infantry of Light: "Get ready!"

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: "This is....."

The Ash Green King: "We will contain their ambush from the left and the right. We will use a defensive formation. No matter how you think about it, five thousand cavalry will have a hard time against twenty thousand spearmen. And just how will they fare against ten thousand musketeers."

Knight of the Kingdom of Mist: "We can do it."

The Ash Green King: "Your targets are the cavalry! Do not be fazed by the illusion! Aim your guns level and fire! Fire!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The Ash Green King: "Reload quickly and fire again! Prepare the second volley!"

———— **The City of the Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Army of Fiends**

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: "What!"

"Agghhhhhh!"

"My hand!"

"The horse! The horse exploded!"

"What! What is going on!"

“Aghhhhh!”

Spearman of Fiends: “What kind of attack is this!? Aghhhh!”

Crack! Crack!

Magic Brigade Commander: “Support them! Do something! Support the knights!”

Fiend Mage: “Agh! Take this, Fireball!”

Fiend Mage: “Take this too! Ball of Frost!”

Boom! Boom!

Spearman of Fiend: “At least let us get to them! Aghh!”

Crack! Crack!

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “!”

Magic Brigade Commander: “It’s impossible! They are too many!”

Fiend Mage: “Commander! The enemy attack is not stopping!”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “Combine your magical abilities and cast something big!”

Magic Brigade Commander: “Understood! All sorcerer level mages gather now!”

Magic swirling

Boom!

Magic Brigade Commander: “Aghhhhh!”

——— The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Demon Army

Aide-de-Camp: “A direct attack on the headquarters!?”

Javelinman of Giants: “Ahhhh!”

Aide-de-Camp: “This is, a cannon!? But I’ve never heard of such a massive thing being able to fire properly before. How is this possible?”

Boom! Boom!

Javelinman of Giants: “Aghh..... my hand.”

Aide-de-Camp: “Fall back! Dragons! Dragon units, advance! Support our retreat! Mercenaries follow me! We will assist the chaos of the Banshees!”

Human Cavalryman: “Damnit.”

Human Swordsman: “Come! I’ve been on the battlefield since I was born. I’m not going to let down all those defenceless peasants!”

Dragon Heavy Lieutenant: “Orders received. Move out!”

Auxiliary of Beasts: “Have no fear!”

Skirmisher of Beasts: “Let’s go!”

Aide-de-Camp: (What a tremendous difference in fighting power!)

——— **The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Demon Army**

Banshee Lieutenant: “! This is bad.”

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Swordsman of Banshees: “Advance! Cut them down!”

Spearman of Banshees: “Alright! Aghhhhhh!!”

Human Cavalryman: “Stop them! Press the attack!”

Musketman of Light: “Ahhhh!”

Spearman of Light: “Die! Demons!”

Human Cavalryman: “Aghhhh!”

“All is as the Spirit wills it!”

“All is as the Spirit wills it!”

“All is as the Spirit wills it!”

Spearman of Light: “For the glory of the Patriarch!”

Sergeant of Light: “For the Holy Spirit of Light! Advance! Attack! Attack!”

Clang! Clang!

Aide-de-Camp: (No, this chaos..... Agh. We knew from the start that their numbers would be overwhelming. This is what they call a *Saturation Attack**. I should have expected this from the start. We knew that we were inferior in fighting power. We were too naïve..... From the start, this has been an army designed for the express purpose of carrying out a saturation attack.)

Crack! Crack!

Aide-de-Camp: “No! Witch-Queen! Please fall back! We must regroup within the City!”

Explanation

Saturation Attack: The act of concentrating your military force in order to overwhelm the enemy's ability to respond effectively. Within the novel, in response to never before seen magic which eroded their ability to aim accurately, the Ash Green King massed his firepower to fire indiscriminately, ensuring that even if only a small percentage of the bullets hit, it would be enough. In this way, he was able to counteract the illusionary magic.

----- The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Holy Crusaders

Survey Soldier: "The enemy's right wing, a section of Giants, has gone silent. They are retreating."

The Ash Green King: "What of the centre?"

Survey Soldier: "The dust blowing about is obscuring our view, however, it appears that the cavalry which ambushed us earlier has been destroyed. The remaining forces appear to be fighting within the chaos."

The Ash Green King: "How very good."

Knight of the Kingdom of Mist: "What now?"

The Ash Green King: "First and Third Company can stand down. Blow the horn. You take command of Fourth Company and drive into their formation."

Knight of the Kingdom of Mist: "Understood!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Musketman of Light: "All is as the Spirit wills it!"

Spearman of Light: "Attack!"

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: "Way too much gunpowder flying about. What is going on?"

The Ash Green King: "A smart commander would have ordered a retreat by now. I cannot confirm, but it appears that the attrition rate has far exceeded their acceptable threshold."

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: "So, what's left to do?"

Attendant Chaplain: "We cannot allow it."

The Ash Green King: “Yes. The frontline is currently locked in a very messy stalemate. When they order a retreat, the masses of people moving to the rear will create a gap, within that gap I will send my reserve force, a six thousand man strong division of elite musketeers armed with the latest flintlock muskets..... When the Demons see that division, they will know it is their end.”

——— **The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Demon Army**

Auxiliary of Beasts: “We will show you the ferocity of the Beasts!”

Skirmisher of Beasts: “Cover the retreat of our comrades! Advance!”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “It’s a retreat.”

Banshee Lieutenant: “Infantry, evacuate the wounded and move back!”

Aide-de-Camp flinches

Auxiliary of Beasts: “We can do this!”

Skirmisher of Beasts: “Go go go!”

Banshee Lieutenant: “Damn.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “What’s wrong, why can’t you retreat faster?”

Banshee Lieutenant: “If we show them that we are turning our backs too quickly, they will take advantage of this gap. And we would effectively have abandoned the Army of Fiends as well.”

Aide-de-Camp: (What’s this..... I’ve got goosebumps on the nape of my neck.....)

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Auxiliary of Beasts: “Ahhhhh!”

Skirmisher of Beasts: “What!? Reinforcements!”

Banshee Lieutenant: “Reinforcements!?”

Aide-de-Camp: (What!? Now we have to face their reserve forces!?)

Swordsman of Banshees: “What! Why do we have to face this too!?”

Spearman of Banshees: “Aghhhh!”

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Aide-de-Camp: “Damnit! Damnit! Damnit! Help! Help us retreat! We have to search for a weak point and concentrate our breakthrough from there!”

Waaggghhhh! Waaaaaaghhhh!

Aide-de-Camp: “!?”

————- **The City of the Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Army of Fiends**

Waaagggghhhh!

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Make way, make way, make way! I am the warrior king of the Beasts, the Silver Tiger Lord! I will kill those who throw aside their swords as well! Come with me! It will be a close fight!”

Dual Swordsman of Beasts: “Ohhhhh!”

Axeman of Beasts: “We the elite Beast warriors will never abandon our allies!”

Howling

The Demon King: “Do not be fixated on the enemy! Leave them in their chaos! Our objective today is to save our friends and help them withdraw to the City of the Gate!”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “Let’s do this!”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “Ugh.....”

Dual Swordsman of Beasts: “Yaaaaaa!”

Axeman of Beasts: “Take this!”

The Demon King: “Magic Brigade! Cast Spells of Obscuring on the infantry! You need to protect our comrades. Cavalry move to protect the Magic Brigade! When the situation allows for it, make sure to retreat to the east! Hurry!”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Put your all into it! Fight together! Move! Warriors of the Beasts! Eat up their left wing! Throw your spears! Break them!”

Auxiliary of Beasts: “The Silver Tiger Lord has returned!”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “I have returned! And we will all return alive to the City! Lend the wounded your shoulders! Anything is fine, we will get back!”

“The Demon King!”

“The Demon King has come to reinforce us!”

“Pull back, the Demon King’s Army is covering our retreat!”

“For her Majesty the King!”

“We are protected by the Ruby Eyes!”

Auxiliary of Beasts: “Attack!”

Skirmisher of Beasts: “Attack! Bring them to their deaths!”

Dual Swordsman of Beasts: “Agghhhh!!”

“For the Demon King!”

“For the Ruby Eyes!”

——— The City of the Gate, Two Kilometres from the South Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Holy Crusaders, the Holy Carriage

“For the Demon King!”

“For the Demon King!”

The Primarch: “..... It’s here.”

Attendant Bishop: “Huh?”

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The Primarch: “The Demon King..... comes.”

Attendant Bishop: “What?”

The Primarch: “The centre of the battlefield..... is now chaotic and messy.”

Attendant Bishop: “How were you able to tell?”

The Primarch: “Hehehe, a sign from the Spirit.” *Cough, cough*

Knight of the Hundred Paladins flinches

The Primarch: “My child.”

Knight of the Hundred Paladins: “Yes!”

The Primarch: “Take the dragoons and surround the Demon King..... Its defences should be thin. I see that have thrown all their forces to support the retreat..... The thinness of their defences will..... surely be their greatest folly.....”

Attendant Bishop: “Knights, prepare to attack!”

Knight of the Hundred Paladins: “Yes!”

The Primarch: “Light bless your brave souls.”

Knight of the Hundred Knights: “Hundred Paladins! We have our orders from the Holy Primarch! Move out!”

——— The City of the Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, the Midst of Battle

“Destroy them!”

“Attack! It’s a retreat!”

"We will defend you, press on!"

Aghhhhh! Aghhhhhhh!!

Knight of the Mist: "You dog of the Demons."

The East Fortress Base Commander: "A dog is enough. Because I have teeth. Let me bite off the pride you have in your human shape!"

Knight of the Mist: "Die! Heretic!"

The East Fortress Base Commander: "Whatever you say!"

Clang!

Knight of the Mist: "Why would a human join the Demons!"

The East Fortress Base Commander: "Why do you insist on attack an opponent who has not attacked you!"

Knight of the Mist: "Demons are the enemy of Light. The source of all evil."

The East Fortress Base Commander: "What a pathetic way of thinking."

Knight of the Mist: "Damn you, do not take the name of the Church in vain."

The East Fortress Base Commander: "Oh I won't! I don't play with shit!"

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Knight of the Mist: "Uncivilised barbarians!"

The East Fortress Base Commander: "Listen to yourself! Aren't you ashamed!"

Knight of the Mist: "Shut up! Shut up!"

The East Fortress Base Commander: "In order to seize the treasures of other people, you bear your sword against them. You are no more than a common bandit!"

Knight of the Mist: "To the victor the spoils of war. That is a norm on the battlefield."

The East Fortress Base Commander: "Yes indeed. We have the same view then!"

Clang! Clang!

Knight of the Mist: "!?"

The East Fortress Base Commander: "I said we have the same views. You lousy knight!! That's why — Whether Human, or Demon, or even a Spirit, we're all the same. You and I, are pathetic existences worth not even a hair of effort! Ha!"

Clang!

Knight of the Mist: "Shut up! Shut up, you mangy dog!"

The East Fortress Base Commander: “Shut me up with your blade then.”

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Knight of the Mist: “Traitor!”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “And that’s why I will never retreat!”

——— **The City of the Gate, the Plains of Strange Cliffs, in the Midst of Battle**

Boom! Boom!

The Demon King: “Hurry! Don’t expose our right flank! Go go go!”

Human Cavalryman: “Your Majesty, this place is unsafe. We must move quickly.”

The Demon King: “But the Magic Brigade—“

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Go, your Majesty..... This is just a battlefield. There are better places for the Demon King to be.”

The Demon King: “.....”

Bang!

Dual Swordsman of Beasts: “!”Bang! Bang!”

Axeman of Beasts: “What!”

Auxiliary of Beasts: “Where is the attack coming from!? Is this magic?”

“The Demon King!”

“The Demon King should be around here, search for him!”

“We shall deliver the hammer of death that incarnation of evil, that traitorous Demon King!”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Kuh. Seems like they found out that the Demon King was on the battlefield somehow. We’ve got to go quickly.”

Human Cavalrymen: “Yes!”

The Demon King: (So the musket was really this powerful..... and how convenient. It’s a compact delivery and concentration of firepower, and its ability to cause such chaos and disruption to enemy lines along with its merciless efficiency. To think that I allowed people like the Holy Crusaders to obtain such malevolent weaponry..... This too, is my fault.)

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The Demon King: (And just how many of them are there? Two hundred thousand? Three hundred thousand? I can't even tell by listening. I've never even experienced such massive numbers before. This is bad. This is really bad..... With such tremendous numbers, such efficient weaponry, they could quite possibly completely exterminate the Demon Race to the very last man.)

Bang!

The Demon King: (Wh- What am I even thinking about. Could such an unrealistic fantasy be true..... However, this evil destructive and devastating ability, will likely result in overflowing amounts of blood. Even though less than half a day has passed since the start of the battle, the earth has soaked in so much blood, it seems to be turning the very air around it black as well..... So this is the hell created by gunpowder..... I..... I.....)

Bang! Bang!

The East Fortress Base Commander: "Your Majesty! Get down!"

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: "Hahahahahaha! Hahahahahaha! Woman of evil, Demon King! This is where you will lose your life today!!"

Clang! Clang!

The Demon King: (It's impossible. There's too many. We can't escape.)

Bang! Bang!

The Silver Tiger Lord: "Agh!"

The Demon King: "Silver Tiger Lord!"

The Silver Tiger Lord: "Hehe. Hahahaha!"

The Demon King: "Silver Tiger Lord! You're bleeding!"

The Silver Tiger Lord: "Hahahaha! Hahahaha! Come, Demon King, hurry! Hurry into the City."

The Demon King: "But....."

The Silver Tiger Lord: "Go to where the people are waiting for you."

The Demon King: "No! Silver Tiger Lord! Don't you leave! I won't allow it!"

The Leader of the Hundred Paladins: "Heh. You were lucky that I missed. The second time, I definitely won't!"

The Silver Tiger Lord: "Did you think I would let you!!"

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Those who are far away, hear this; those who are close by, see it with your eyes. See the military pride of the most noble of Demon Races, the Tribe of Beasts. See their leader, the white tiger. Standing with pride, with my seven foot spear. I am the fearsome general of the Demon World! My family name is Kai, my personal name is Souun, with black eyes and snow-white hair, they call me the Silver Tiger. You pathetic soldiers are no match for me!”

Dual Swordsman of Beasts: “!”

The Demon King: “Silver Tiger Lord!”

Knight of the Hundred Paladins: “Die!”

Knight of the Hundred Paladins: “Die you monster! Die!”

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

The Demon King: “Silver Tiger Lord—“

The East Fortress Base Commander: “No! Your Majesty, you must not go!”

Bang! Bang!

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Hahahahaha! The battlefield is the hometown of us Beasts! This is a fun battle, Your Majesty! Such dream-like days. My heart feels light, whatever I say, whatever do, all make me happy. Hah! Hah!”

The Demon King: “No! No!”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “— I will try to keep my promise. We the Beasts are people of war. However, while we may be rough and while, we will not endure shame. The loyalty we have sworn to the Demon King will be repaid to the very end! Hahahahahaha!”

The Demon King: “Silver Tiger Lord!”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “.....”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Hahahaha! Human warriors. Base Commander. I apologise. And I will leave this to you. Of the three promises I have made, two have been accomplished, but the last one still needs to be done. Hahahahahaha!”

Knight of the Hundred Paladins: “You monster!”

The Silver Tiger Lord: “Shut up!”

Clang!

The Silver Tiger Lord: “The Demon King is weak. Weak. Unreliable, light and emotionless. However, the entire Demon World is being supported on her shoulders.....

Base Commander. I recognise you as a wild warrior as well! A great man! A battle buddy and a drinking buddy! I can rely on you.”

Bang! Bang!

The East Fortress Base Commander: “———“

The Silver Tiger Lord: “After my death, support..... the Demon King..... to the end.....”

The Demon King: “Silver Tiger Lord!!”

Bang!

Chapter 8, “The Names of Those Who Cannot Return.”

Demon Thrush: “.....”

The Hero: “Don’t screw with me!”

Demon Thrush: “I understand that you’re angry, sir.”

The Hero: “What?”

Demon Thrush: “People, whether Human or Demon are all like that.”

The Hero: “.....?”

Demon Thrush: “People are not like you, they do not have your magical power or your battle ability or your teleportation, they do not have your limitless courage and your impossible stubbornness. Compared to you right now, people are hundreds of times more powerless.”

The Hero: “Ah.....”

Demon Thrush: “However, people are not wooden dolls.”

The Hero: “Sorry. I..... I said something I didn’t mean.”

Demon Thrush: “.....”

The Hero: “Okay, continue your surveillance.”

Demon Thrush: “Yes, sir.”

Flaps away

The Hero: (I want to help them. Everybody. Humans and Demons both. Why can’t I help them? Why can’t I do what I really want to do? Always and always— Demon King..... Please be okay. In just a little while, just a little while, the Mage’s preparations will all be complete. So just hold on.)

——- **The City of the Gate, the Self Governing Council, the Barracks**

“The Demon King!”

“The Demon King!”

“The Demon King has returned!”

Human Elder: “It seems that she’s returned safely!”

Fiend Merchant: “Her Majesty has returned without harm.”

The Demon King: “— I’m sorry for making worry. Make preparations, we will hold a military conference.”

Aide-de-Camp: “My lord. I have been very worried.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “You and I both.”

Aide-de-Camp: “I am pleased to see you unharmed.....”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “I wouldn’t say unharmed.....”

The Fire Dragon Lady: “Your Majesty.”

The Demon King: “We are in the midst of battle. But it is good that we are all unharmed.”

The Fire Dragon Lady: “Yes.”

The Demon King: “I am carrying a very heavy burden. I recognise that. Even if I were to wager my entire life, I would still be unable to do anything.”

The Fire Dragon Lady: “..... Yes.”

The Demon King: “For the names of those who cannot return.”

The Fire Dragon Lady: “.....”

The Demon King: “Somebody! Call the person responsible the defences of the fortress. The man who design the fortifications. It should be a Fiend with a sleepy face. I’m eager to see how he has changed from an unreliable guy to an unwavering adult with forward-facing red eyes. Call him over!”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “Banshee.....?”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “Your Majesty, who is this person?”

The Demon King: “Just a boy who I taught some things to a very long time ago. If he continued to build up on his experiences from that time, he should be able to construct some very formidable defences now. If he is as I expect him to be, these fortifications may well form the lifeline of this battle.”

Human Elder: “..... What!”

Aide-de-Camp: “So that person is your Majesty’s disciple?”

The Fire Dragon Lady: “So that’s why he was willing to do it.”

The Demon King: “Well then, members of the Self-Governing Council.”

Human Elder: “Yes.”

Fiend Merchant: “Yes.”

The Demon King: “In my absence, I have placed a large amount of worry and burden on your shoulders. I apologise for the impact my naivete has had on the turn of events. — And I thank you for enduring thus far.”

Human Elder: “No.....”

Aide-de-Camp: “.....”

The Demon King: “We will need to continue to survive. Chieftain.”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “Your Majesty.”

The Demon King: “How are your wounds?”

The Tattooed Chieftain of Fiends: “With some more rest, I should be able to rejoin the battlefield.”

The Demon King: “Do not press yourself. I do not want to see a repeat of what happened to the Silver Tiger Lord.”

Aide-de-Camp: “.....”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “.....”

The Demon King: “Base Commander. Can I count on you?”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “Yes.”

The Demon King: “Then I appoint you the Commander-General and entrust to you our counter-attack.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “I humbly accept your appointment. I give my life as your shield.”

The Demon King: “— That’s.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “I won’t allow a word of complaint even if you’re the Demon King.”

The Demon King: “..... Witch-Queen.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “Yes.”

The Demon King: “I will entrust the organisation of the interior of the City, as well as the maintenance of public order to the Self Governing Council. The Witch-Queen and the Tribe of Banshees shall take charge of this. I entreat all to lend her your assistance to expedite things.”

The Witch-Queen of Banshees: “I understand.”

The Demon King: “I will not allow this City to fall. That is something I promise to the Demons and to the Humans alike. If this City were to fall again in a blaze of furious fire, the echoes of their screams will form a curse lasting a thousand years, forming a black chain that will forever bind the fates of the Human and Demon Races. We were not born for conflict. However, in order to prove exactly what it is we were born for, we have to live beyond today. I will not allow this battle to consume the City of the Gate!”

——— **The City of the Gate, the Encampment of the Holy Crusaders Surrounding the Fortress**

Green Ash King: “How is it?”

Scout: “I apologise. We did not detect the surprise attack from the rear.”

Green Ash King: “No, I do not mind. We are all working for the sake of the dominance of His Holiness under heaven. It is our duty to protect him in this manner. Do you have any reports regarding the outcome of the attack?”

Scout: “It appears that the Demon Army losses amount to 30,000.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Green Ash King, how is it going?”

Green Ash King: “The enemy losses are 30,000; approximately half of their strength.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Half? Were you not instructed to exterminate them!?”

Scout: (A simple girl who knows nothing of the realities of war.)

Green Ash King: “Please do not say that. Well..... Under doctrine, in order for an army to be unable to function effectively, all that is required is the loss of a third of an army’s forces. The Demon Army, which has lost half of its forces is practically destroyed.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Heh. Demons..... Exterminate them.”

Green Ash King: “We will need to regroup our forces and reform our frontlines. The noble soldiers will rest for the time being, and in the meantime, the frontline will be manned by the knights of the Kingdom of the Mist.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “Hahahaha. We shall ride into the City and squish them like insects.”

Green Ash King: “Yes. The Demons are no longer able to sally out and fight us in the field. Furthermore, our siege is proceeding very well. Their unsightly, turtle-like fortifications should not be able to endure another afternoon of cannonade fire.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “I assume it is no question that they will drown in a sea of despair and pain?”

Green Ash King: “We will continue our siege. Musketeers to defensive positions. Cannons, adopt positions and begin firing! Infantry units link up with logistics units to construct our rear support area!”

----- **The City of the Gate, Atop the Citadel, Defenders**

Beast Soldier: "The sun is going down! Hurry!"

Disciple Engineer: "Light the lanterns."

Giant Craftsman: "..... How bright."

Volunteer Archer: "What is this?"

Disciple Engineer: "A glass mirror. Right then, let's support the retreat. Engineers, raise the ramparts! Load up the oil and rubble."

Giant Craftsman: "Understood....."

Volunteer Archer: "Open up! Open up, there are wounded!"

Human Craftsman: "We cannot do that, the people will flood in."

Disciple Engineer: "Open the doors to the temples! We will put up a tentage between the hills."

Boom! Boom!

Giant Craftsman: "!"

Human Craftsman: "What's that sound!?"

Boom!

Disciple Engineer: "Stay calm! Those are cannons. They are giant metal tubes filled with gunpowder."

Human Craftsman: "What? Then will we be alright?"

Disciple Engineer: "Listen up! The fortifications will be fine. They are thick and we have built them slope in anticipation of the cannon fire. Everything is proceeding within our calculations. Time is short, but we have prepared good fortifications. So, calm down!"

Giant Craftsman: "That's....."

Banshee Craftsman: "Our engineer can't be lying! He's the one who managed to build those incredible stone bridges after all!"

Human Craftsman: "He is?"

Disciple Engineer: "Assist the soldiers! Volunteers, carry in the wounded."

Beast Soldier: "Understood!"

Banshee Craftsman: "Let's go!"

Human Craftsman: "How about us?"

Disciple Engineer: “Engineers will stand watch. The clock tower of the Temple is not appropriate. While it is made of stone, it is still not very strong. Watch the enemy positions from atop the walls. Do not use bright lights, try to observe by your eyes alone.”

Human Craftsman: “Understood!”

Disciple Engineer: “Apart from that, we need to speed up the movement of supplies. Bring water up using the pulley systems. Tonight it seems we will have to endure an entire night of cannon fire. Let’s have a rotating shift. Umm. Where should we put our emergency headquarters? Damnit. I’m just an engineer!”

Fiend Signaller: “Hey! Hey!”

Giant Craftsman: “What is it.....?”

Fiend Signaller: “Who’s in charge here? Who’s the man who design the forts?”

Disciple Engineer: “Design? That would be me.”

Fiend Signaller: “Sir! You are wanted by Her Majesty the Demon King.”

Disciple Engineer: “The Demon King!? Wow. But I’m just an engineer. Why would such an important person..... No, perhaps she’s not pleased with the state of the fortress. Spare me!! I’m not a military person! I shouldn’t be punished under military law!”

Fiend Signaller: “Her Majesty had instructions for me. — ‘If he seems reluctant to comply, tell him that the one who wants him is Ruby Eyes.’

Disciple Engineer: “Master!?”

——— **The City of the Gate, a Busy Street, a Covered Tent**

“Aghhh, my leg.”

“It burns. It burns.”

“Aghhh.”

“It hurts. Somebody.”

“Water. Please. Just a glass..... Water.....”

Demon Girl: “Boil more water! Those lightly injured people, help with the bandages, and someone get me more thread.”

Human Civilian: “Water!?”

Demon Girl: “I’m sorry. Sorry. I gave instructions as if I was some bigshot.”

Middle-Aged Dragon Woman: “What’s with that expression! You are the person in charge of the Temple Hospital! Water? I’ll get it!”

Medic: “Coming through! Coming through!”

Demon Girl: “Sorry!”

Signaller: “Madam, we have exhausted the stocks of cloth in the warehouses of the Self-Governing Council. What should we do?”

Demon Girl: “Umm, that’s... Well..... Hands.....”

Signaller: “Hands? I understand. I will get the volunteers to come and help.”

Demon Girl: “Sorry. Sorry!”

One-Handed Beastman: “This girl.....”

Demon Girl: “Ah! Sorry.”

One-Handed Beastman: “Damnit, what now.”

Demon Girl: “I will bandage you up now. Leave it to me..... Even though I’m not very good at it.”

One-Handed Beastman: “It doesn’t really matter. I’m already one-handed anyway.”

Demon Girl: “Sorry, sorry!”

One-Handed Beastman: “Agh..... Girl, can you get me some wine to drink?”

Demon Girl: “No, no! If you drink it’ll make you bleed!”

One-Handed Beastman: “Shut up! What kind of battle is it when you can’t drink?”

Demon Girl: “No, no! I already told you no, didn’t I! And you’re already missing a hand! You still want to go out and fight!?”

One-Handed Beastman: “Of course. You can’t stop us. This is a fight to the finish. Alright, hurry up and fix me up. Make my arm good and hard, maybe I’ll attach a metal pole there and go out to fight.”

Tightens bandage

Demon Girl: “.....”

One-Handed Beastman: “Thank you.”

Demon Girl: “..... I couldn’t help at all. I’m sorry.”

One-Handed Beastman: “Nah, it’s fine. You’re helping with what you can do. That’s the best thing to do.”

—— **The Kingdom of the Lake, the Capital, the Headquarters of the Union**

Union Employee: “The report is finished.”

Young Merchant: “How is it?”

Union Employee: “As expected, we were unable to completely cover the entire region. I have made a pictorial graph..... We control 30% of the main trading routes.”

Female Union Employee: “As expected, the sheer number of churches is just incredible.”

Even if we turned all our branches into banks, we would still need ten times that number.”

Young Merchant: “Leaving the number of branches aside, if our friends in the banks were to begin issuing money orders as well, how many lines would we be able to open?”

Union Employee: “Umm. 38 routes.”

Young Merchant: “As expected, those are the critical trading routes.”

Union Employee: “To begin with, the branches of the Union are concentrated in important trading cities and countries where trade goods are being produced, so it’s obvious that the routes we have access to will comprise of critical trading routes.”

Young Merchant: “The problem is, if we take a share of these routes, in other words, if we take over their money orders, how much damage can we do to the Church?”

Union Employee: “Umm.....”

Young Merchant: “What do you think, Branch Chief?”

Branch Chief: “I can’t give you an exact answer, but our annual revenue from these trading routes can increase by up to 15%. However, routes apart from this, in other words, routes which are subordinate to the main trading routes, can still be heavily affected by our transactions.”

Female Union Employee: “What do you mean subordinate?”

Branch Chief: “For example, wheat goes from the trading cities to the port cities through smaller routes passing through some villages..... Something like that. These regions have networks of small trading routes which fall outside the purview of our operations. However, these routes all share the main trading city as their starting point, don’t they? In that case, a large proportion of the wheat will pass through the primary trading routes. Even an unimportant terminal route has an extremely high possibility of having most of its goods originate from a primary trading route.”

Female Union Employee: “I see.....”

Branch Chief: “If you think about it this way, I would estimate that we would be able to swallow up 20-30% of the Church’s money orders along all the trading routes.”

Young Merchant: “30%..... In that case, perhaps we need to conquer these trading routes.”

Branch Chief: "How much do we need?"

Young Merchant: "To avoid a mudslinging campaign, 60%."

Branch Chief: "Hmm....."

Young Merchant: "How about it?"

Branch Chief: "No. So 30% is not possible then?"

Young Merchant: "We need a bit more. I want to create our victory by stealing their share. That's the kind of impression I want to make."

Branch Chief: "What can you buy with that impression?"

Young Merchant: "We can discuss that after we win."

Union Employee: "Hmm." *Scratches head*

Female Union Employee: "Why are you scratching your head like that?"

Union Employee: "I seem to be thinking of something. It feels like something is going to come out. To avoid a mudslinging campaign..... Uhh. It feels like a similar situation has happened before."

Female Union Employee: "How did it turn out?"

Union Employee: "No idea."

Female Union Employee: "That's no help at all."

Young Merchant: "Mmm."

Union Employee: "30..... I suppose the point of view is that it's before the competition."

Young Merchant: "Before the competition—"

Union Employee: "..... Yeah, that's the key."

Female Union Employee: "....."

Branch Chief: "What are you so troubled about? We can't make a decision just yet."

Young Merchant: "Yeah, let's wait."

Branch Chief: "..... Pressure them? No..... Purchase their share? What we need is something the enemy doesn't have, that we have!"

Young Merchant: "Time. How about that?"

Union Employee: "That's true. How do we use that.....?"

Young Merchant: "We will stockpile the money orders we have purchased and flood the market with them..... Then we will announce our victory in that time and raise our share..... That's double. Double of 30%."

Female Union Employee: "Huh? Huh!?"

Young Merchant: "I understand. First we need to win. Anything else comes after that..... Shall we go with this?"

Union Employee: "Okay. It'll definitely work!"

———— The City of the Gate, the Encampment of the Holy Crusaders Surrounding the City

Boom.....

Disciple Bard: "How are you doing?"

Crusader: "Ahh, sorry."

Spearman of Light: "Is there enough water?"

Auxiliary of Light: "Ms Bard, Ms Bard. I couldn't find any mugwort, but there is some cattail."

Disciple Bard: "Put it over there."

Boom!

Noble Squire: "Agh."

Disciple Bard: "Be strong. If we stop the bleeding, we might be able to save your arm."

Noble Squire: "Those damn demons."

Disciple Bard: "....."

Spearman of Light: "Sigh....."

Auxiliary of Light: "It's painful."

Spearman of Light: "Yeah, my ears keep ringing. I can't hear a thing anymore."

Auxiliary of Light: "Probably on account of the cannons."

Crusader: "They make an amazing sound."

Boom!

"Hahahaha! What formidable defences!"

"It took us just one day to put up these things!"

Spearman of Light: "..... Seems like those guys are doing their best as well."

Disciple Bard: “—— The Beasts are a tribe of warriors. They are absolutely loyal to the Demon King and have all pledged their lives to her cause.”

Spearman of Light: “Eh?”

Disciple Bard: “That’s why, I think they’re fighting very courageously. They’re here to protect their homes and their lord.”

Auxiliary of Light: “Why do you know..... so much?”

Ears stand up

Disciple Bard: “..... Ehehe.”

Spearman of Light: “Your ears!”

Auxiliary of Light: “Ms Bard, don’t tell me-“

Disciple Bard: “Well, keep this a secret.”

Spearman of Light: “Why.....”

Auxiliary of Light: “Ms Bard, you’re a Demon.....”

Disciple Bard: “Demons come in all shapes and sizes. Some Demons even look like Humans.”

Spearman of Light: “That’s.....”

Disciple Bard: “I apologise for startling you.”

Spearman of Light: “Ms Bard, you’ll be killed if you stay in a place like this.”

Auxiliary of Light: “In any case, hide your ears.”

Disciple Bard: “Well, yeah.” *Tucks ears under hat*

Spearman of Light: “.....”

Auxiliary of Light: “.....”

Disciple Bard: “.....”

Spearman of Light: “Why would you do that?”

Disciple Bard: “Because I don’t want this war to happen. At the very least, it is not what I wish for.”

Spearman of Light: “But-“

Disciple Bard: “I decided. In the middle of it all, I will continue singing. Whatever I see, I will not run away. I still do not know what it is that I can do, but that is what I decided.”

Spearman of Light: “.....”

Auxiliary of Light: “MS Bard.”

Disciple Bard: “Sorry.”

Spearman of Light: “No, you’re our benefactor.”

Auxiliary of Light: “You should do what you want to do.”

Disciple Bard: “.....”

Spearman of Light: “We don’t know what is right or wrong anymore. I realised that after listening to your songs.”

Auxiliary of Light: “That’s right.”

Disciple Bard: “Yeah.”

Spearman of Light: “Your songs have really had an effect on us. So we’ll help you keep this secret.”

——— **The City of the Gate, the Holy Crusaders Surrounding the City**

Green Ash King: “How is it?”

Scout: “..... The third barrage has been confirmed. However, we are unable to ascertain any visible damage.”

Green Ash King: “What are you saying? How can that be?”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “What is happening?”

Green Ash King: “Hmph..... Somehow it seems that those *Sloped Walls* are not like normal walls. They may be black and unsightly, but it appears that they offer significant protection against cannon fire.”

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “I was informed that in all previous tests, even the strongest fortifications were reduced to rubble after three hours.”

Green Ash King: “This is the Demon World. It is reasonable that tests which apply in the Human World are not effective over here. We will confirm what is going on, but we don’t have the time.”

Artillery Commander: “Fire!”

Cannoneer: “Yes!”

Boom!

Leader of the Hundred Paladins: “But—“

Green Ash King: “Despite that, we have other means. We’ll demonstrate the obvious difference in fighting strength and numbers. Artillery Brigade!”

Artillery Commander: “Yes!”

Green Ash King: “Form your brigade into four batteries. Take turns to pound them continuously without stopping. Don’t let this Demon City have any rest!”

Explanation

Sloped Walls: When large calibre artillery were introduced onto the battlefield, defences had to be specialised to endure direct cannon fire. Rather than height, thickness was prioritised; and in order to deflect the rounds, the walls were constructed as a slope.

——— The City of the Gate, Atop the Walls, the Defensive Unit

Boom!

Giant Craftsman: “.....!”

Beast Soldier: “Damnit! We can’t sleep at all like this.”

Human Craftsman: “Damn.”

Disciple Engineer: “Let us sleep damnit.”

Giant Craftsman: “..... Defend.....”

Disciple Engineer: “We can’t keep this up! Half of you go back and sleep! We’ll form two shifts!”

Beast Soldier: “Got it.”

Giant Craftsman: “Ahh! Leader, the wall is giving way!”

Human Craftsman: “Get a maintenance squad to cover it up!”

Disciple Engineer: “Use rubble. And don’t forget to bring water up in buckets!”

Giant Craftsman: “Rocks, tiles.....”

Disciple Engineer: “If we work like this we’re going to have more injuries. Wait till dawn.”

Giant Craftsman: “Got it.....”

Disciple Engineer: (Ahhhhh. Teacher, teacher. Was it a joke that you were the Demon King!? Thanks to you I’ve become the head of a defensive maintenance unit, a real commander..... Agh, damnit. Not yet! These defences can still hold on much longer!)

Banshee Craftsman: “Not yet. Damn, dawn is still..... far away.”

Disciple Engineer: (..... Disciple Bard. Are you alright? Are you doing well? Have you found the song you’ve been seeking? Until you return, I will not allow this City to fall.”

——— **The Imperial Army, the Tent of the Hero**

The Mage: “..... Hero.”

The Hero: “..... Mmm.”

The Mage: “Hero.”

The Hero: “Whoa!? Is it the Mage!?”

The Mage: “Yeah.”

The Hero: “..... Where are you?”

The Mage: “..... This is a long distance call. I’m in a secret place.”

The Hero: “That’s no explanation at all.”

The Mage: “It’s a secret.”

The Hero: “Ahh, fine.”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “Hey.”

The Mage: “?”

The Hero: “Not yet?”

The Mage: “Not yet.”

The Hero: “At this rate, it’s going to end before I can even do anything.”

The Mage: “Right.”

The Hero: “..... Why?”

The Mage: “Like I explained, if you make a move, it will just make everything even more chaotic. So I just need you to wait a while more.”

The Hero: “What for?”

The Mage: “..... An ancient magical ritual.”

The Hero: “I don’t get it.”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “.....”

The Mage: “Hero.”

The Hero: “Mmm?”

The Mage: “I’m not you.”

The Hero: “— Sorry.”

The Mage: “No, I don’t hate you because of that.”

The Hero: “But I’m just a person who robs others.”

The Mage: “I was a fake Hero from the start. A counterfeit.”

The Hero: “You’re you. You’re the Mage. You’re the real thing.”

The Mage: “—— That’s because I’m not the Hero.”

The Hero: “.....”

The Mage: “A person like me who just goes back and forth, can’t understand the real Hero.”

The Hero: “..... Why are you saying something like that now?”

The Mage: “.....?”

The Hero: “That has nothing to do with this, doesn’t it?”

The Mage: “..... I am me. No matter where I go, it doesn’t matter.”

The Hero: “Then get rid of those previous thoughts.”

The Mage: “So I can meet the Hero.”

The Hero: “.....”

The Mage: “So just trust me.....”

The Hero: “I wasn’t doubting you to begin with.”

The Mage: “—— Sorry.”

The Hero: “It’s alright.”

The Mage: “— I apologise from the bottom of my heart.”

The Hero: “You didn’t do anything bad! Why are you apologising!?”

The Mage: “?”

The Hero: “You’re starting to make me doubt you!”

The Mage: “Hehe.”

The Hero: “What a bitter smile.”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “..... Good grief.”

The Mage: “..... Just a while more. Just ten days more.”

The Hero: “Wait.”

The Mage: “.....”

The Hero: “I’m not worrying. I will act as you instruct. I know it’s important.”

The Mage: “..... Yes.”

The Hero: “I don’t understand your explanation, but I understand at least, that it’s important.”

The Mage: “Yeah. — Hero.”

The Hero: “Yes?”

The Mage: “..... Nothing.”

The Hero: “Really?”

The Mage: “— I’m going to eat some cream pie and take a nap.”

The Hero: “Don’t sleep yet!”

The Mage: “I’m hanging up.”

The Hero: “Hey!”

Click

The Hero: “Damn. I don’t get it..... But hmm, ten days. I just need to hold on for that long..... I hope nothing happens in that time, Demon King, Paladin.....”

—— The Kingdom of the Lake, the Capital, the Headquarters of the Merchant’s Union

Female Union Employee: “Buy. Buy it all up.”

Union Employee: “It’s fine, so just buy. I don’t really care how much the commission is. Just make sure they feel the presence of the Merchant’s Union in this.”

Female Union Employee: “That’s right. Buy up the money orders.”

Courier: “Three quick horses have arrived!”

Union Employee: "Dispatch them individual to the Free Trading Cities. Have them do circular despatches between the Merchant's Union branches."

Female Union Employee: "We have made contact with the Minister of Finance from the Kingdom of Waves. We will now begin negotiations!"

Young Merchant: "How is it going?"

Branch Chief: "It seems that we're gradually making progress."

Young Merchant: "All of these bargains are necessary tinder for our fire."

Branch Chief: "Will this strategy of ours work?"

Union Employee: "*People believe lies to accomplish realities, or to defeat realities. When two realities are rolled into one lie, even a duck will swallow it as it does a ball of feed.*"

Branch Chief: "Hmm. That's one of the maxims of the Merchant's Union."

Young Merchant: "..... Firstly, with the Holy Order of the Lake having completed the smallpox vaccination programme, Branchquarters of the Order have begun to be established all across the Free Cities. Further, refugees fleeing smallpox have begun to flow into the Southern Alliance. That is a fact."

Branch Chief: "Yes."

Young Merchant: "Secondly, whether or not next year's wheat harvest is prosperous or a failure, in order to supply the battlefield, it will need to be purchased at a high price. Having obtained these purchasing rights, the tax collectors of the Church have no way of avoiding this inflation. Furthermore, churches throughout the land have started to levy metal for the purpose of forging weaponry, to the extent that church bells are even being melted down. This too is a fact."

Branch Chief: "Yes."

Young Merchant: "..... And so, the fact is that the coffers of the Church are under severe pressure, and with the money orders, bankruptcy is just ahead of them."

Branch Chief: "..... That is a lie."

Young Merchant: "That may be a lie, but it's not 'just a lie', is it?"

Female Union Employee: "Eh? What's the difference?"

Young Merchant: "The money orders are basically money that the merchants have deposited with the Church. For this security, they pay a commission of 10% of the deposit. For example, if you place a hundred gold piece deposit with them, then you receive a certificate entitling you to collect ninety gold pieces from any church. Your money decreases, but this certificate can effectively be converted into cash at any church. In this way, risks are decreased. However, it is impossible for the certificates to

be converted immediately into cash. For example, holding a certificate for ninety gold pieces is effectively the same as holding those ninety gold pieces, however, it is much safer to travel over long distances with the certificate. As such, as a merchant, if you had to pick between carrying cash or money order, isn't it obvious that you would pick the money order?"

Female Union Employee: "Yes, that's a reality in the market."

Young Merchant: "In other words, some money orders exist that cannot be easily liquidated. If you look at it from a different perspective, a money order is basically a loan from the merchants to the Church. If all the merchants were to make a withdrawal at one go, then the Church has the obligation to pay them. So if you were a merchant who discovered that the Church might have some cash flow problems, what would you do?"

Branch Chief: "Ah!"

Young Merchant: "That's right. I would try to convert all my money orders into cash as quickly as possible. If the Church's wallet is overstretched, then they might be unable to reimburse the money orders. If that were to happen, all those certificates would become worthless trash."

Female Union Employee: "Will that really take down the Church?"

Young Merchant: "Of course not! No matter how stretched the finances of the Church are, they aren't that weak. If you were to aggregate the donations from the people and other countries, taxes and levies, industries and the sale of absolutions, the wealth of the Church is immensely larger than the Union. They truly hold an astronomical amount in their treasury. Such a small-scale reversal is unlikely to be enough to destroy them."

Female Union Employee: "Then."

Young Merchant: "However, if we were really able to get the merchants to make a mass withdrawal, the Church's inexhaustible supply of money would be of no help to them."

Branch Chief: "Indeed."

Female Union Employee: "Really..... Why?"

Union Employee: "It's impossible for every single church to have an inexhaustible supply, am I right? Don't forget that moving money across vast distances is risky and takes a lot of time as well."

Female Union Employee: "Y, you're right!!"

Union Employee: "That's right. Even if the Cathedral in the Holy Imperial City has got the money, it's impossible to send that money to the other churches in time."

Young Merchant: "There will be a limit to the extent our rumours can spread, but I believe the speed of spread is faster than the speed that the Church can convoy their money about. To begin with, various processes have to be fulfilled according to internal

Church policies and organisation, so it forms a political issue as well. Compared to steady change, sudden reversals of situation will be much harder to deal with. These intricate processes will compound with the difficulties involved in sending money about, and they can't possibly appease all the panicked merchants attempting to draw out their money. With such timing, our victory is assured."

Chapter 9, “The Crown Prince Marshal. The World’s Greatest Hero.”

—— The Demon World, the South, the Old Lands of the Pale, the Crown Prince’s Army

Crown Prince Marshal: “An envoy?”

Scout: “Yes. On a hill half a mile from here, they have raised a white flag. It’s..... a Human.”

Strategist: “Human.....”

Holy Imperial General: “What does that mean?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “How many of them are there?”

Scout: “We saw approximately ten of them, but the lee of the hill has a large primeval Demon forest inside of which any number of soldiers could be laying an ambush.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Human.....”

Holy Imperial General: “What should we do, Your Imperial Highness?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Interesting, let’s meet.”

Strategist: “Hmm.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Take ten men from our side as well and go and pay compliments to them over at that hill. Express that we have no desire for unnecessary conflict.”

Strategist: “Do we really have to lower ourselves to that level?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Until we know our opponent’s true colours.”

Scout: “No, we were going to go over, but it seems like they have come into our camp instead.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hahaha. What brave men.”

Scout: “Well, there are females too.....”

—— The Demon King, the South, the Old Lands of the Pale, the Crown Prince’s Army

Elder Sister Maid: “Thank you for agreeing to meet with us.”

Nobleman Disciple: “What a powerful army.”

Mercenary Survivor: “.....”

Crown Prince Marshal: (Who..... is this woman?)

Strategist: “In that case, allow us to introduce ourselves first. We are the Imperial Expeditionary Force from the Holy Crusaders. This is his Highness the Crown Prince Marshal of the Holy Empire. I am the Strategist. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

Holy Imperial General: “I am the Holy Imperial General.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “I am the Crown Prince Marshal. So let’s hear what your identities and objectives are.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes. I am known as the Elder Sister Maid. My identity is..... a travelling scholar. At present, I am the commander in charge of this army.”

Strategist: “Army.....?”

Nobleman Disciple: “I am the Nobleman Disciple.”

Elder Sister Maid: “This is the Mercenary Lord. He is in command of my personal guard. He’s very strong.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Hmm. Don’t forget it.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “So, what are your aims?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I would like to confirm one thing, is this unit currently advancing with the objective of claiming the City of the Pale?”

Holy Imperial General: “Shouldn’t you know that just by looking?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Then I hope you can take your men home.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Doing as she pleases as usual.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Haha. Young lady. No, Ms Commander. Just what sort of power do you have to make me do this?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes. I currently command that place.”

Strategist: “What!?”

Holy Imperial General: “What did you say!?”

Elder Sister Maid: “The region was entrusted by the Demon King to the Tribe of Automaton, and as a result of our peaceful negotiations, the City has been turned over to us. These are the documents which verify it.”

Strategist: “..... Don’t tell me.”

Elder Sister Maid: “As the governor of the region, I would like to make a request to your army. Your army is currently advancing to claim the Old Region of the Pale. If you do not wish to be joined in battle, you should take your armies and leave the region.”

Holy Imperial General: “Do not wish to be joined in battle!? Who do you think we are, don’t joke around!”

Elder Sister Maid: “So you want to unjustly invade a Human controlled region?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “.....”

Strategist: “What.....”

Elder Sister Maid: “My forces are comprised solely of Humans. At present, the Old Region of the Pale is administered completely by Humans.”

Strategist: “What nonsense. What do you mean by unjust? This is nothing more than a larger army trampling over a weaker one. We are doing nothing else but occupying just another country.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I think you should consider taking those words back.”

Strategist: (Damn. What should we do now? No matter how small they are, they must have been large enough to conquer their way into the Demon World..... We can expect at least ten to twenty thousand of them. It’s not a small number.....)

Disciple Nobleman: “If that’s not enough, I am a special envoy from the Kingdom of Ice.”

Holy Imperial General: “The Kingdom of Ice!?”

Strategist: “The Southern Alliance has come this far!?”

Disciple Nobleman: “That is correct, to the Old Region of the Pale. At present, this territory is under the control of our armies, but we have the intention of allowing it to be reborn as a self-governing territory. Of course, it will be part of the Southern Alliance.”

Strategist: (What..... This guy. If he’s being serious, then we can’t afford to be drawn into total war with the Southern Alliance. Of course, we can definitely crush them, but when we return, the defenceless capital would be left in ashes. Does this mean that these guys are holding the entire Continent hostage while we are down here!?)

Crown Prince Marshal: “Do you have any proof for your words?”

Disciple Nobleman: “Of course, all you have to do is to inquire with the Kingdom of Ice. But we don’t have any evidence to say we aren’t lying. This area is completely under our control, and we have the intention to keep it that way, so all I can do is convey our deepest condolences from the Kingdom of Ice for your loss.”

Mercenary Survivor: (Those two are surprisingly.....)

Strategist: “..... Your Royal Highness.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “One could say that we did not know about it, so that is our fault. Our intelligence was slow and wrong. I apologise.”

Holy Imperial General: “.....”

Elder Sister Maid nods

Crown Prince Marshal: “However, we have no intention to withdraw. This expedition was authorised under holy order of His Holiness the Primarch. In other words, it is the will of the Spirit of Light. Even though the nations of the Central Continent have no quarrel with the Southern Alliance, the Church of Light has officially proclaimed the Southern Alliance to be heretical. As you know, the Holy Crusaders are technically at war with the Southern Alliance. Have you forgotten that?”

Elder Sister Maid flinches

Strategist: (Your Royal Highness! You could, you could start a war like that. If we threaten the Southern Alliance, we might really be at war with them! We can’t handle that much!)

Crown Prince Marshal: “However, it is also a fact that beginning with us at the Holy Empire, the countries of the Central Continent all find this turn of events to be very regrettable. No matter how we put it, we’re all humans after all. One could say that we are comrades who took up swords and spears against the threat of the Demons. It would be a painful thought for a commander like myself to point these tens of thousands of muskets at fellow humans. Even if the Holy Crusaders are in a state of war with the Southern Alliance, as a commander of the Central Continent, I also do not wish for war.”

Disciple Nobleman: (Heh..... So he’s not above using such rhetoric. The war is the will of the Church, so the Holy Empire has nothing to do with it. As to be expected from the brains of the Holy Crusaders. What a person overflowing in talent.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Indeed. Since we are all fellow human comrades, there is no benefit to be had from us fighting.”

Mercenary Survivor: (How exciting, I can feel the sweat running down my palms.)

Crown Prince Marshal: “We have received orders from the Primarch to conquer this territory in order to establish supply lines. As Children of Light, we cannot defy this order.”

Elder Sister Maid: “We are also Children of Light as part of the Holy Order of the Lake. The Holy Order of the Lake accepts anyone, even you, the Crown Prince Marshal or the Holy Empire.”

Disciple Nobleman: (She said it! As expected from a fellow disciple of our teacher.)

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hahahaha. I thank you for your invitation, however I must decline. As their big brother, the Holy Empire has a duty to uphold the due process in the Central Continent.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Due process?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Security. Why do you think that people can live in security? That is because today will be like yesterday, and tomorrow will be like today. Why can they sleep at night? That is because they are assured that they will open their eyes in the morning. If there is a chance that they can die in their sleep, nobody would be able to sleep from the fear. However, based on our experience, we know we will be able to open our eyes. That is repetitive action, and the due process.

Of course, there are examples of misfortune. You could die from disease, or be the subject of some violent crime as you lie sleeping. These have the effect of breaking the due process. If the due process is disrupted, that results in chaos. As guardians of security, the Central Continent strives for the peace of the people. We protected it yesterday, we are protecting it today, and we will protect it tomorrow.”

Elder Sister Maid: “The followings of the Church of Light, the serf caste system, and the rights of the nobility and monarchy..... Is this what you’re trying to protect without changing?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “To be it simply, yes. And the people are happy from it.”

Disciple Nobleman: (He may be the enemy, but his actions are perfectly calculated. This is a very impressive young man.)

Elder Sister Maid: “So, what’s your final decision?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “We must have this supply route. However, we do not hope for war. The Primarch has decreed that we are at a state of war, but right here right now, that we would meet in a place like this is a completely unpredictable situation. And this is the Demon World. Since we are both Human armies, we should try to avoid whittling down our armies, right? So, I have a suggestion. Please provide us with 4000 wagons of food as well as 1000 wagons of saltpetre. We will of course pay for it. The price will amount to 30 New Imperial Gold coins?”

Mercenary Survivor: (Ridiculous. That wouldn’t even be able to pay for a single weapon!)

Disciple Nobleman: “And if we decline?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Then we will have to fight a painful battle, and establish our supply lines by force.”

Disciple Nobleman: “You mean to invade the Southern Alliance?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “That is the will of the Church of Light. Of course, this hurts us all in the Central Continent.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Keh. So you are threatening us then.”

Strategist: “Are you trying to be disrespectful!?”

The Hero: “No, I want to listen too. Who’s threatening whom? The Crown Prince Marshall is..... threatening some Human army?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Hero! What are you doing here?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hero. — Do you know this person!?”

Mercenary Survivor: “Hey, aren’t you that guy from that time.....”

Strategist: (This is bad. I was wondering what he would think, but if we force the Hero to bare his fangs against us — the morale of the soldiers will surely drop sharply. At this timing, would he turn against us!?)

—— The Southern Demon World, the Reunion of the Elder Sister Maid and the Hero

The Hero: “Elder Sister Maid!”

Elder Sister Maid: “Hero.”

The Hero: “What are you doing in a place like this? And you’re the leader too? What’s all this?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Hehehehehe. I’m quite surprised by the turn of events as well.”

The Hero: “..... But you’re here?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I’m here.”

The Hero: “Alone?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Of course not. I’ve got everyone to back me up.”

The Hero: “Have you found your reason to be?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Umm. Yeah..... That’s right, I have to decide it on my own.”

The Hero: “Is that so?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I’m sorry, Hero.”

The Hero: “Why?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Hero, you’ve been covering for me for such a very long time.”

The Hero: “Hahaha. Don’t worry about that.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I do. I just want to clear this debt that I have to you.”

The Hero: “You don’t have to.”

Elder Sister Maid: “..... Is that so?”

The Hero: “You don’t owe me a single thing.”

Elder Sister Maid: “.....”

The Hero: “You have the face of a fighting person.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Am I that scary?”

The Hero: “That’s not what I meant, how should I say this. You’ve got an iron gut.....
No, well, it just seems like you have reached some revelation.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I don’t know about that.....”

The Hero: “Yes.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Hero.....”

The Hero: “What is it?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Have..... you lost a lot of blood?”

The Hero: “Huh? Well, I only know how to fight.”

Elder Sister Maid: “That’s not true.”

The Hero: “Am I injured? Not at all. My arms and legs are all still here. This is the body of a Hero.”

Elder Sister Maid is worried

The Hero: “Umm. Well..... Don’t give that expression.”

Elder Sister Maid: “..... No. I apologise as always.”

The Hero: “Eh?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I’ve always been this way, and I apologise for it.”

The Hero: “What is going on, Elder Sister Maid?”

Elder Sister Maid: “It’s fine. I am doing things according to plan. Everything according to what you and the Mistress have been planning.”

The Hero: “..... Elder Sister Maid?”

Elder Sister Maid: “No. Hero, why are you in the army of the Crown Prince Marshal?”

The Hero: “Well, those are the instructions of the Mage. I am currently undercover.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I see..... What kind of person is the Crown Prince Marshal?”

The Hero: “He is not a simple man..... But among the people in the Holy Crusaders, he is the most incredible. His methods won’t lose to anyone.....”

Elder Sister Maid: “Is that so.....”

The Hero: “What plans do you have to drive him away?”

Elder Sister Maid: “That’s a secret.”

The Hero: “Come on.”

Elder Sister Maid: “It’s still a secret.”

—— The City of the Gate, the Encampment of the Holy Crusaders Laying Siege to the City

——— *Boom!*

Ash Green King: “A week. — They’re tougher than expected.”

Scout: “Damages are within our calculations, however, their repair works are proceeding faster than we foresaw. If we focus our fire on the gate.....”

Ash Green King: “But if we don’t do anything about the fortifications on the left and right of the gate, our cannons won’t be able to get close enough to aim properly. This design is very..... well-conceived.”

Scout: “Yes.....”

Ash Green King: “What have you found out?”

Scout: “Their *earthworks** are constructed with the specific purpose of withstanding our bombardments. The earth absorbs the impact and reduces the shock on the fortifications.”

Ash Green King: “And the slope.....”

——— *Boom!*

Pedigree Nobleman: “Why is our continuous bombardment having no effect?”

Adult Nobleman: “Didn’t they explain to us that the new cannons have twenty times the firepower of the old ones?”

Warrior Nobleman: “—— Ash Green King. They say he’s brave and brilliant, but he seems to be slow and useless.”

Pedigree Nobleman: “And our remaining amount of ammunition.....”

Adult Nobleman: “Forget ammunition! We don’t even have enough food supplies.”

Warrior Nobleman: “What is happening to our supply lines? We’re running out of spare parts to maintain our muskets too.”

Artillery Commander: "Your Majesty."

Ash Green King: "Yes."

Artillery Commander: "What instructions do you have for today's bombardment....."

Ash Green King: "Focus your fire on the right hand side fortifications. However, continue to direct a quarter of our fire to the left side so that the enemy does not have any security or rest."

Artillery Commander: "Yes, umm....."

Ash Green King: "What is it?"

Artillery Commander: "Actually, the high quality gunpowder for the cannons....."

Scout: "....."

Ash Green King: "How much do we have left?"

Artillery Commander: "At this rate of fire, another three or four days....."

——— *Boom!*

Ash Green King: "Do not reduce our fire. If the enemy comes to learn of our ammunition shortage, they will begin to have hope. For gunpowder, transfer some of the musket power to our artillery batteries. Continue firing at this rate. If we can destroy the right side fortifications, we have a chance at breaking down the main gate."

Explanation

Earthworks: In order to reinforce defenses against enemy incursions, earthworks are created by building up large amounts of soil. In most cases, this is carried out in conjunction with defensive ditches. The soil from the dug ditches is piled up to create the ditches. As a result, the height of the earthworks is doubled and it becomes even more difficult for enemies to cross.

Artillery Commander: "Yes! We will do our best."

Scout: "....."

Ash Green King: "Damn. What's with this situation? Like a snake on the verge of death, this is painful to watch. We've fallen into the trap of laying siege to the City of the Gate."

Scout: "Your Majesty!"

Ash Green King: "What is it?"

Scout: "Actually, the Leader of the Hundred Paladins....."

Ash Green King: "That woman?"

Scout: "Night after night, she has been gathering the musketeers in large numbers to preach about things that don't sound like official teachings."

Ash Green King: "Gathering?"

Scout: "Yes, she says that the treasure of Light is in the City of the Gate. That we have to take the City no matter what. That this is the sacred duty of the followers of Light."

Ash Green King: "A poisonous flower indeed....."

Scout: "What should we do?"

Ash Green King: "This poisonous scent is still very sweet, but we won't fall prey to it..... Let it be. I will settle it somehow."

——— **The City of the Gate, the Chambers of Commerce**

..... *Boom!*

Shrewd Accountant: "Milady, are you here?"

Fire Dragon Lady: "Shrewd Accountant..... Have the Chambers been evacuated?"

Shrewd Accountant: "Yes, to put it nicely, they were delivered to the Flaming Mountains."

Middle Aged Merchant: "We must thank the Fire Dragon Lord."

Fire Dragon Lady: "My father will definitely protect them."

Shrewd Accountant: "Our records and treasury have also been successfully delivered, Milady....."

Fire Dragon Lady: "I will stay here."

Shrewd Accountant: "....."

..... *Boom!*

Fire Dragon Lady: "I may be a merchant, however, I am a lady of the Tribe of Dragons, and a Councillor of the Self-Governing Council. I will not run away in such times of crisis."

Middle Aged Merchant: "That's what I want to say as well."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Your escape comes from instructions given by the Young Merchant. I don't suppose you have any objections?"

Shrewd Accountant: "....."

Middle Aged Merchant: "....."

Boom.....

Fire Dragon Lady: "Well then, you should escape quickly."

Middle Aged Merchant: "..... Understood."

Shrewd Accountant: "Please be careful, Princess."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Don't call me princess."

Middle Aged Merchant: "Hahahaha! If you don't like it, then allow me one last time. If the City is taken, please do your best to negotiate for favourable terms."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Understood....."

Shrewd Accountant: "Then, we'll be going first."

Middle Aged Merchant: "We will try to get reinforcements."

Fire Dragon Lady: (Merchants..... The City of the Gate was eventually engulfed in the flames of war. I want to protect this City. But I don't know what I can do.....)

—— The City of the Gate, the Encampment of the Holy Crusaders Laying Siege to the City

..... Boom!

The Primarch: "Go ahead."

Chaplain: "Yes. Two thousand five hundred pigs, eight wagons of wheat, seven jars of sugar beet, two wagons of fruits and spices, four wagons of cloth and winterwear....."

Door opens

Soldier of Light: "Excuse me."

Chaplain: "What is it, you have a message?"

Soldier of Light: "Yes."

Attendant Bishop: "Speak."

Soldier of Light: "Yes. One of our encampments at the Portal has come under surprise attack from an unknown enemy force."

Chaplain: "What!?"

Attendant Bishop: "What? Explain in detail."

Soldier of Light: "Yes, this is what I heard from the soldiers who escaped..... Crack Demon infantry launched a surprise attack and plundered the food and weapon stocks!"

Attendant Bishop: "That's all?"

Soldier of Light: “Yes. I’m not certain how many exactly, however the casualties incurred were relatively few. Even though all the horses escaped, the Demons did not pursue the routed soldiers and allowed them to rejoin the main armies.”

The Primarch: “Enough.”

Soldier of Light: “Sorry?”

The Primarch: “Enough. Continue the attack.”

Attendant Bishop: “..... Alright, go.”

Soldier of Light: “Yes! Yes! Understood!”

The Primarch: “How are the walls?”

Attendant Bishop: “Yes. Beginning yesterday, the rate of repairs appears to have slowed. It seems that the resources in the City are running out. A portion of the war has already broken down, and it seems it will be another four or five days before we are able to make a breach.”

The Primarch: “How annoyingly resilient. Order an attack.”

Attendant Bishop: “But.....”

The Primarch: “It is the will of the Spirit.”

Attendant Bishop: “.....”

The Primarch: “Let us go to the garden of Light. It is time to bring terror to the people in that City.”

—— The City of the Gate, the Encampment of the Holy Crusaders Laying Siege to the City

..... *Boom!*

Believer of Light: “Did you hear?”

Musketeer of Light: “Yeah.”

Spearman of Light: “What?”

Believer of Light: “It seems that the Second and Third co-ordinating zones have fallen.”

Spearman of Light: “Really!?”

Porter: “Heyyyy! Give me some water!”

Believer of Light: “Yeah, look. It seems the number of people here have been increasing, right? It seems the food and weapons were plundered and they journeyed here through vast wastelands.”

Musketeer of Light: "Is that so? It's good that they managed to survive though."

Artilleryman: "Is it really?"

Musketeer of Light: "What do you mean?"

Artilleryman: "Think about it. These guys were guarding our rear supply lines and raising food. Now that the food has been plundered and they've been pushed towards the frontlines, we don't have any more food, but we have many more mouths to feed instead."

Boom.....!

Believer of Light: "....."

Musketeer of Light: "But they are our comrades!"

Spearman of Light: "So it's fine!"

Believer of Light: "In any case, once we capture the City, we'll have all its food and water in our hands!"

Spearman of Light: "....."

Musketeer of Light: "What is it?"

Spearman of Light: "No, think about it. Tomorrow we will have continuously bombarded the City for ten days straight, right? The noblemen and commanders keep talking about how we will have all the food and treasures of the City as soon as we capture it, but do you really think there are any? I mean, the City is filled with Demons right? So won't the City also just be filled with Demon food that we can't eat?"

Believer of Light: "....."

Musketeer of Light: "That's....."

Spearman of Light: "In that case, we will be put out into this wilderness without any food again."

Cavalryman of Light: "No, that's not true. The reason why the Crown Prince Marshal isn't here has to do with that."

Musketeer of Light: "Eh?"

Cavalryman of Light: "His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince Marshal along with the great Hero are assaulting Demon territories to establish firm supply lines. I'm sure they will be returning soon. So it's all okay."

Spearman of Light: "So that's it! The Hero too!"

Artilleryman: "Is that why we haven't seen His Imperial Highness at the frontlines?"

Cavalryman of Light: “That’s right. Once his Imperial Highness returns, we’ll destroy those walls in one volley, and there’s no way we won’t attain our victory.”

——— **The City of the Gate, the Encampment of the Holy Crusaders Laying Siege to the City**

Pedigree Nobleman: “What!?”

Adult Nobleman: “What do you mean not enough?”

Quartermaster: “Of course, most of our supplies are already depleted. But stocks of oil and barley are completely empty.....”

Warrior Nobleman: “If our supplies don’t come through.....”

Quartermaster: “Yes. If our supplies don’t come through, we could be staring at the face of a full-blown insurrection and mutiny by our peasant soldiers.”

Proud Paladin: “They’re serfs, we’ll just put them down! Nothing to lose sleep over. If we just kill ten of them like lambs, the rest will learn their lessons.”

Warrior Nobleman: “Can we really entrust such angered peasants with muskets!? But if we don’t distribute the muskets, the serfs might cause us to lose favourable positions, and we might not be able to maintain our advantage on the battlefield.”

Pedigree Nobleman: “That’s right. We really don’t want to have angry, crazy serfs at our back. And they’re carrying muskets too.....”

Proud Paladin: “Damn.”

Pedigree Nobleman: “What can we do.....”

Quartermaster: “— Among the serfs, many of them come from backgrounds of extreme famine, and were coerced by the promise of proper care by His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince Marshal. There are rumours that His Imperial Highness will soon return with supplies.”

Adult Nobleman: “His Imperial Highness.....”

Warrior Nobleman: “He’s pretty good on the battlefield. But what the Holy Crusade really requires is a brilliant military commander.”

Adult Nobleman: “But the Church has a very good impression of him.”

Pedigree Nobleman: “That impression comes from external reasons. The Primarch needs to create unity among the Holy Crusaders, so he purposely chose His Imperial Highness to create divisions within the pacifist factions.”

Proud Paladin: “I apologise for saying this. But His Imperial Highness’ voice is powerful and I believe he will be able to turn the situation around.”

Pedigree Nobleman: “But the supplies.....”

Adult Nobleman: “Hmm.”

Warrior Nobleman: “?”

Adult Nobleman: “Hahaha. In that case, in the name of the Holy Crusaders of the Spirit of Light, let us request His Most Imperial Highness to deliver supplies to us.”

Pedigree Nobleman: “That’s—“

Proud Paladin: “Ah, that’s true!”

Adult Nobleman: “Alright, get a quick horse! Send His Imperial Highness an official request for supplies!”

——— **The City of the Gate, the Defence Council**

Boom.....

The Demon King: “What? We don’t have any shortages of anything?”

Fiend Merchant: “Your Majesty!? I do believe it would best if you didn’t come to places like this and focussed on your recuperation!”

The Demon King: “I have nothing to do while resting. Is this the way to the top of the fortifications?”

Fiend Merchant: “Yes it is.”

Boom.....!

Disciple Engineer: “Miss the mud and quicklime! Let it flow down from the top.”

Giant Craftsman: “Understood.....”

Craftsman of the Pale: “Get some quicklime up here too!”

Human Craftsman: “Hey move it, wagon coming through!”

The Demon King: “How is everything?”

Disciple Engineer: “Umm..... Yes.”

The Demon King: “Don’t be nervous. You’re already a grown man.”

Disciple Engineer: “That may be so but, I didn’t expect you to be the Demon King! What should I do now?”

The Demon King: “What’s the situation?”

Disciple Engineer: “To be honest, we are at our limit. There are lots of areas of the wall which could fall at any time. We are overworked and fatigued, every day we are overstretched. Even though it appears to be spread out, the enemy fire is concentrated

at certain areas. The East side is facing the brunt of it. Our maintenance is concentrated there, but it would be no surprise if it becomes the first area to fall.”

The East Fortress Base Commander: “The East side.....”

The Fire Dragon Lady: (The Human armies are so numerous..... and they seem to be neverending..... Ahh, but we can’t lose this war. I at least know that.)

Boom.....!

The Demon King: “Which areas of the wall are holding up just fine?”

Disciple Engineer: “The area close to the Southwest temple. That area hasn’t suffered any attacks yet, and from the beginning the walls there were the thickest. If that area were to be attacked, we could probably hold out for a week..... I think.”

The Demon King: “A week.....”

Human Elder: “Your Majesty, at this rate the City will.....”

The Demon King: “Don’t look so dejected, Elder. That has not yet been decided. The real battle begins now.”

Human Elder: “But even if we last a week, even if we last a month, we can’t possibly last forever.....”

The Fire Dragon Lady: (At present, this war has become a battle of attrition. We still have ample food stocks, but we are running out of materials to repair the walls with..... On the other hand, we have no idea how long the Human Army can continue, or whether they have limits to their supplies. The Young Merchant was absolutely right. The war is not just something fought on the battlefield.)

The Demon King: “It’s fine..... We still have ways. Fire Dragon Lady!”

The Fire Dragon Lady: “Yes.”

The Demon King: “I’m sorry, but will you deliver this to the Fire Dragon Lord?”

Human Elder: “That’s.....?”

The Fire Dragon Lady: (A white paper.....!?)

The Demon King: “A request for reinforcements. The Demon World is huge. We are certain to have enough soldiers to save this City somewhere. We just need to buy enough time for them to arrive.”

The Fire Dragon Lady: (It’s not impossible that such a force exists somewhere, but even if there is..... In the face of those muskets capable of creating a 30,000 man mass grave in half a day, which chief would be willing to send their men to help? So the Demon King had to write an official white paper.....)

The East Fortress Base Commander: "I'm sorry. I'm not sure we can get everybody home alive. I am grateful for the hard work of the Volunteer Corps."

Human Volunteer: "Well, it's fine. We're happy to be of some use to the repairs of the fortifications considering we're people who can't use swords or ride horses."

Middle Aged Dragon Lady: "That's right! Ahahaha. Relax!"

Dragon Volunteer: "At nightfall, we will dig out the cannonballs in the walls again. They'll load those onto our catapults and send them right back to make them regret it!"

The Demon King: "Mmm. Just a bit more!"

Human Elder: "Yes, Your Majesty. Be at ease!"

Fiend Merchant: "Alright. I'll go and tidy up the store and see if I can't get some food for you guys."

Human Craftsman: "Don't worry about the food. Our stockpiles are quite sufficient. We probably have enough for two or three more months."

Boom.....!

The Fire Dragon Lady: "....."

The East Fortress Base Commander: "Princess, tonight?"

The Fire Dragon Lady: "..... Eh?"

The East Fortress Base Commander: "You're headed to that old man, right? Her Majesty has entrusted me to deliver you safely. The numbers are few, but these will be your personal guard."

The Fire Dragon Lady: "Yes....."

The Demon King: "Now! Look up! This is the Free City of the Gate! We will protect it! For the future!"

The Fire Dragon Lady: (Her Majesty's aim is for the future..... Even if the City falls, if Father sends enough soldiers we can still stop the Humans from advancing through the Demon World. I understand that is what the white paper represents. But.....)

Boom.....

The Fire Dragon Lady: (But a lady like myself, who has seen so little of the world should do something. For this City. For the Silver Tiger Lord who gave his life to the Demon King. — For the heroes who gave their lives to the defence of this City. What can I do.....)

Chapter 10, “My Name Shall be Henceforth Known as—”

—— The Kingdom of the Lake, the Capital, the Headquarters of the Merchant’s Union

Union Employee: “Yes, yes. That’s right.”

Female Union Employee: “There have been three occurrences of lack of capital in Free Cities on the West Bank.”

Branch Chief: “It has begun.”

Young Merchant: “Will we be able to destroy the lines?”

Branch Chief: “It seems that the rumour is spreading quickly to towards the West. The fire has spread to the Kingdom of Waves and the neighbouring three Free Cities.”

Young Merchant: “Understood. Then gather 65% of the letters of exchange owned by the Union in those three Cities. When you evaluate them to have the greatest impact, liquidate these letters at the same time.”

Union Employee: “Yes.”

Young Merchant: “With this one strike, the three churches in these three cities will run out of cash. Merchants will experience their worst nightmare of being unable to exchange their credit for cash. Once they realise that, they will speed away to neighbouring cities and exchange their credit for cash as soon as possible. That will spread the lack of money across neighbouring cities. — The rumour will grow into a panic, and how will we kick our plan to acquire credit from the landlords into action?”

Union Employee: “Leave it to the Union agents. They have already been instructed to purchase credit at 70% face value.”

Branch Chief: “Landlords hoping to liquidate their assets as soon as possible will flock to sell it to us. And we will buy.”

Young Merchant: “The plan we are putting into motion has no backup plan. If anything were to happen, it may be out of control even for the Union. For that reason, once we begin, we have to pay close attention to the whole situation. It is not our wish for any further panic beyond what we require to achieve our aims.”

Branch Chief: “Understood.”

Young Merchant: “We will need to verify the precise timing for our plan in the three cities. Branch Chief, can you settle it?”

Branch Chief: “Me? I would have thought you would want to do it personally.”

Young Merchant: “I have duties I need to perform here.”

Union Employee: “Duties?”

Branch Chief: “..... Hmm.”

Young Merchant: “This entire plan rests on timing. For the Church, credit is a critical source of revenue. There is no way they would be willing to let this rest. However, the Church is a massive and widespread organisation. If trouble were to happen, they would have to pass on the information and formulate strategies, which would probably take a month. We expect the Church to see this as a natural occurrence that happens every few years, but if they manage to see through this disturbance as a deliberate act, it may ignite conflict. My duty and the issue of timing is to prevent this from being spread outside. That’s why I cannot be on site.”

Union Employee: “.....?”

Branch Chief: “Understood. I will coordinate the plan on-site.”

Young Merchant: “Yes, thank you. If necessary, you may also use all the letters of credit and even all liquidatable assets held by the Union. What we need to achieve victory for the Union is a disciplined panic. In other words, this entire operation is a fraud. We will need to achieve that moment of illusion in order to attain our goals.”

Branch Chief: “Understood. Be at ease. We will destroy this Continent from within its reinforced doors.”

——— The Demon King, the South, the Old Lands of the Pale, the Crown Prince’s Army

Clip clop! Clip clop!

Crown Prince Marshal: “What is going on?”

Strategist: “An urgent message from the frontline.”

Holy Imperial General: “What does it say?”

Strategist: “I haven’t read it yet.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Well go on.”

Opens envelope

Crown Prince Marshal: “..... ..”

Strategist: “How is it going?”

Crown Prince Marshal: "The siege has been delayed. The Demon Army has retreated within the City of the Gate for a week. We are being pushed to our supply limits for gunpowder and food. We have managed to deliver some food from the our rear defence area, but the continuous use of our cannons is exhausting our gunpowder supply alarmingly."

Strategist: "Yes. As I mentioned in the previous message, we have been bombarding the city night and day in order to destroy the morale of the citizens and reduce their will to fight, but....."

Holy Imperial General: "Since ancient times, launching an assault during a siege has been an inferior strategy, while surrounding them and relying on psychological warfare has been the superior strategy. The command decision of the Ash Green King is sound."

Crown Prince Marshal: "It may be sound, but will soundness achieve victory?"

Holy Imperial General: "It is definitely..... a difficult fight."

Crown Prince Marshal: "However, considering that the Ash Green King has been bombarding the city continuously for a week, it is unexpected that the Demon Army would be able to hold on for so long. Had we not witnessed it ourselves, it would be hard to believe..... I wonder what sort of fortification is able to withstand such a protracted assault."

Strategist: "Indeed. With a hundred cannons, even the heaviest fortifications should crumble within a few hours."

Holy Imperial General: "As to be expected from Demon technology."

Crown Prince Marshal: "It's fine. Above that, what is even more surprising is the high morale of the army and citizens under siege. They have endured a week long bombardment, been cut off from all communications and supplies and have already lost half of their original army. I would expect the city to be overflowing with injured and half-dead people. As morale weakens, talk of surrender and capitulation should be running rife. The will to fight and resist gets sapped, despair and disappointment runs rampant, and at the moment where fighting spirit is at its very lowest, to launch an assault is the standard strategy of city sieges..... No matter how strong the fortifications are, once morale is drained, the fight becomes half-hearted."

Strategist: "What else does the message say?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "In the name of the Holy Spirit, impose a levy on saltpetre and return at this very moment."

Holy Imperial General: "How impertinent."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Hmph. This message comes from the nobles..... What is to be done about food? What is the situation regarding our rear supply areas?"

Holy Imperial General: "What shall we do?"

Crown Prince Marshal: “It also says — Gathering all the food supplies and sending our troops back is the only way to save our lives. The good offices of the noblemen should ensure that the noble armies have a priority to supplies, that is the will of the Church..... Isn’t that too easy!”

Holy Imperial General: “How shameless.”

Strategist: “I fear the gunpowder we have on hand is too limited. It’s clear from their desperate tone that our own morale is dipping..... This is a battlefield. Not just saltpetre, but our stocks of sulphur and charcoal are also running low, yet only saltpetre can be said to be valuable. If we were to reduce the volume of fire, the Demons might realise that we are running low on supplies and that would boost their morale. — If that happens, we won’t be able to achieve a speedy victory. The morale in that Demon City is already unnaturally high, we can’t afford to give them even another shard of hope.”

Holy Imperial General: “However, we haven’t managed to get our hands on any saltpetre, all we’ve been doing is hanging about the outskirts of the Old Territory of the Pale and wasting time. If only that girl wasn’t around.”

Strategist: “Surely saying that we are wasting time is too harsh. General, I think you know that against the Hero and the Scholar, we have to apply very delicate negotiations and diplomacy.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Perhaps stalling us in this manner is one of the aims of the Scholar.....”

Strategist: “Indeed. However——“

Crown Prince Marshal: “Yes, this can be said to be a stalemate. We can’t use any of our military strength, and they have no choice but to give way to us. At present, we have received two hundred wagons of food as a tribute. And with our presence here, we can seal the movements of the army of the Scholar — this secret Southern Alliance expeditionary army. Apart from the negotiating table, we can prevent the possibility of the Southern Alliance reinforcing the Demon Army. And above that, we can restrict the movements of the Hero and prevent him from leaving this place.”

Holy Imperial General: “But all of this is pointless unless the Green Ash King’s army is able to achieve victory in the attack on the City of the Gate.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “We have no choice. We’re depending on them and they are depending on us too.”

Strategist: “The army requires the saltpetre and food rations which we are holding. We are depending on them to successfully take the City of the Gate, to change the military balance of power and give us an advantage in negotiations, otherwise we do not have a strong strategy to counteract the Hero.”

Holy Imperial General: “A *thousand day hand**.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “..... At this rate, we will make no progress. We have no choice. Call the Hero. Let’s try to discern the true identity of this woman they call the Scholar.”

Explanation

Thousand Day Hand: In certain chess or shogi games, the positions of the pieces may be such that the optimum move for both players results in the board returning to the same position every time. In the case of a thousand day hand in chess, the player who initiates the play must break the hand. In the case of shogi, it is the reverse.

——— The Demon King, the South, the Old Lands of the Pale, the Crown Prince’s Army

Tent flap opens

Strategist: “The Hero has arrived.”

Holy Imperial General: “Send him in.”

Tent flap opens

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hero.”

The Hero: “Hello.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “It has been a long time..... I’ve almost forgotten what you look like. Are you having a pleasant time?”

The Hero: “Of course. The Head Chef has been treating me very well. Yeah, even though the meat is mostly Demon Beasts, he’s come up with good ways to prepare it. It’s still very different from meat though.”

Holy Imperial General: “I apologise.”

The Hero: “I’m a freeloader, so I’m not complaining. Thank you for your hospitality.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Then, Hero. Putting those words aside, I have something to inquire of you.”

The Hero: “What is it? Go ahead.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hearing you say that puts me very much at ease. Allow me to ask, are you well-acquainted with that girl?”

The Hero: “Yeah, you could say that.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Exactly who is she?”

The Hero: “Mmm, she’s one of the disciples of that person the Holy Empire and the Church call the Crimson Scholar..... She’s the one who started the whole liberation of the serfs.”

Strategist: “That girl?”

Holy Imperial General: “Don’t tell me she’s that girl?”

The Hero: “It surprised me as well.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hmm. — I see. She made that speech. Hahaha.”

Strategist: “Your Imperial Highness.....”

The Hero: “You could say it was a speech, or you could also say it was just an outburst.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “That woman..... the Crimson Scholar. The writer of ‘The Genius’ Manuscript’, the reformer of agriculture in the South, an all-round genius. The Crimson Scholar they call ‘the Light of the South’. Hehehehe. Hahahahaha.”

The Hero: “..... I haven’t heard all those rumours before.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Do you believe she has the ability to change the world?”

The Hero: “I don’t know.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “.....”

The Hero: “I am just following my instructions.”

Holy Imperial General: “— How do you feel?”

The Hero: “What about?”

Holy Imperial General: “About this war. We are deeply grateful that you have accompanied us thus far. But, are we to believe that you are merely accompanying us? Hero, it is time you told us what your true intentions are.”

The Hero: “I have only ever had one true intention. To protect the world.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Our Human world? In that case, why would you impede the progress of your Human comrades? The Southern Alliance are now pointing their blades at us Holy Crusaders. So which side are you on?”

The Hero: “Stop saying such things, Your Imperial Highness. I am the world’s greatest hero, am I not? I have walked this world for years. The world is the world. In this world, there are Humans and there Demons. It’s common for Humans wage their petty wars with their own ideas of justice, using whatever names they can, whether its heroes or the Spirit. What’s the difference now?”

Strategist: “! What!?”

Holy Imperial General: "That is heresy!"

The Hero: "Heresy is decided by the people of the Church, but I don't worship the Spirit of Light. I have an individual relationship with her and I help her carry out some tasks is all. I am just a Hero of justice. I am not an adherent."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Hehehehehe. Hahahahaha!"

The Hero: "Did I say something strange?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "Well..... It's nothing. If you think about it carefully, it's actually nothing strange for the Hero to say. It's perfectly normal. Finally, you're saying what you've kept hidden in your heart..... Well no, you've never actually tried to hide it."

Strategist: "Strategist: "Your Imperial Highness."

Crown Prince Marshal: "In that case, Hero, in the fight between me and the Crimson Scholar, between the Demon Army and the Holy Crusaders, you should be neutral and impartial. Is that correct?"

The Hero: "That's right."

Crown Prince Marshal: "No matter what happens?"

The Hero: "No matter what happens."

Crown Prince Marshal: "So what will you do about the events unfolding in front of you?"

The Hero: "Will you not stop?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "I will not. — Hero. Have you not heard? We are fighting for the peace and order of the people. What have you gained from this liberation of the serfs? In the end, all you have achieved is chaos. All you have done is to bait the serfs to the poor, hungry and infertile South, where they merely become new slaves under new masters, nothing more than a change of name. No matter how one thinks about it, creating this sort of false hope is far less advantageous than maintaining the present institutions and organisation which has kept the land at peace. History has shown us that this is the only way to continue. Talk of revolution and change is merely the stuff of dreams. Am I wrong, Hero?"

The Hero: "It seems to me that all of this is protecting the interests of the Holy Empire."

Crown Prince Marshal: "That is correct. And why is that wrong? Accusing a king of pursuing selfish pursuits for his own country is only the biased view of a person with no power. Kings pursue wealth for their country. When the country is wealthy, the people are at peace, and they will not tread on the path of chaos. In pursuing advantage for the Holy Empire, I fight for peace and order for the people, is that something which should be opposed? No matter what, all I am doing is attempting to maximise the benefit for the people."

The Hero: "....."

Crown Prince Marshal: “We in the Central Continent have a long history of stability and progress. This was something created from the serf system and the community of nobles. Denying that these results were attained is as foolish as denying the very ground we stand on. Nobody can. Of course, this structure has some weaknesses and flaws, but we have never attempted to imply that the system is infallible. Nonetheless, for hundreds of years, Human society has prospered from it. This progress and history is the path of the Holy Empire. Because I believe this is the right path, I am willing to preserve it.”

The Hero: “Well, that’s true. It would be wrong to say that all new things are good things. When new things begin, they have no experience, no results, no tried and proven methods, so someone getting hurt or difficulties being faced are completely natural.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “.....”

The Hero: “But according to her, even if Humans are defeated, they still retain their freedom.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “So I should allow us to preserve our current freedoms, and maintain the present systems and institutions?”

The Hero: “It’s a good reasoning, isn’t it?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Try to understand, Hero. This is the reasoning of a person who holds freedom at her highest interest trying to push her intentions onto you. — I hope her meddling has not been successful.”

Holy Imperial General: “.....”

The Hero: “.....”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hmph. I hope you can concede that I also have a point.”

The Hero: “Your Imperial Highness. In that case, in reverse perhaps you might concede that the new initiatives of that woman..... for example, the agricultural reforms and the liberation of serfs, have a point as well?”

Holy Imperial General: “What do you mean?”

The Hero: “It is not correct to say that new things are correct. But following the same line of reasoning, it is not correct say that things which used to be correct will remain correct forever.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “The logic is sound. And there is also the matter of freedom.”

The Hero: “So as it stands both sides are equal, right?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Indeed.”

The Hero: “Both sides are Humans, both sides are equal, so as the Hero, I should not interfere?”

Crown Prince Marshal: "Correct."

The Hero: "Then, if I do not interfere, with both sides fighting for freedom, will righteousness—"

Crown Prince Marshal: "I cannot say that I am completely benevolent or completely just. However, in order to champion the cause you think is right, sometimes strength is necessary. Accumulating that strength is a severe test, a battlefield in its own right; and by standing on that battlefield, she too is a warrior. There is no question of age or gender in this."

The Hero: "That statement is true."

Crown Prince Marshal: "In that case."

The Hero: "Before you say 'in that case'. — Crown Prince Marshal. The world's greatest hero. With a single phrase of 'in that case', in order to impose your personal views on others, you display your military might on the battlefield..... In other words, as the Hero, I have the free will and a duty to uphold to crush violence where I see it."

Strategist: "That's—"

Holy Imperial General: "Hero....."

The Hero: "As you say, Humans all have differing opinions, but don't we have the right to have differing opinions? On this point, I respect your opinion over that of the Church. If you were to ask me if the Church or the Crown Prince is better, I would definitely vote for you. In a world where it is impossible to differentiate justice, in order to solve issues and fight for one's ideals, is violence the solution? If that is not what you want, then I will be willing to take a backseat. But, if violence is your way of achieving justice, then I will have to act accordingly."

Crown Prince Marshal: "....."

The Hero: "I am not being patronising. No matter how, having treated me to so much great food, I still bear gratitude towards you..... However."

Holy Imperial General bangs the table

The Hero: "I don't think I have to say the rest, your Imperial Highness? You understand, right? Half of the Holy Crusaders are here. I hope that we can avoid violence. In other words, you can probably take it that the Church and I are at conflict."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Is that a threat, Hero?"

The Hero: "Well—"

Crown Prince Marshal: "In that case, allow me to say something as well. I have tens of thousands of muskets. No matter how powerful you are, if you think about it, there's no way you can single-handedly defeat them all, and I know you're hardly that conceited. I will take severe losses, but I will win. I have confidence in this."

The Hero: “Of course. I’m not that conceited. However, Your Imperial Highness. I am not a Hero who will solve issues with violence and destruction. But, you people think that that is all that I can do. Being a guy who can only do that, who can only meaninglessly mumble aphorisms, do you know what that is like?”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hero.....”

The Hero: “If violence could solve things, don’t you think I would have solved everything from the start? If I could avoid this troublesome state of affairs, I definitely would..... I really want to fly into this battle and try to put a stop to this meaningless bloodbath..... Your Imperial Highness. The greatest hero in the land. If we want to do something right, consider that you have the same objective as she does, to pursue what is ‘beyond that hill’.”

——— The Demon World, the South, the Old Lands of the Pale, the Encampment

Mercenary Archer: “I’m getting irritated..... It’s been five days.”

Small Mercenary: “Yeah.”

Elder Sister Maid: “We have to persevere.”

Mercenary Archer: “Even if you say that..... Our minds are slowly draining. I mean, we don’t even a hundred people here!?”

Small Mercenary: “Moreover, we’re checking the movement of fifty thousand Holy Crusaders, protecting this territory against them is insanity. If they discover that this Secret Southern Alliance Expeditionary Force doesn’t even actually exist, they’re going to massacre everybody.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Well, if you think about it, whether or not we have a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand men, if they massacre us, everyone is going to die together.” *Smile*

Small Mercenary: “How can you say something so hopeless with a smile!”

Young Mercenary: “Come now.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Well, it seems we’ve won though.”

Elder Sister Maid: “That’s right.”

Mercenary Archer: “Really!? But at the negotiations we had no choice but to agree to their demands for us to give them food.”

Disciple Nobleman: “That’s not really related.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Think about it. Hypothetically, imagine if we were the legitimate army of a large country. At the very best we would only be able to hold off an army of such size for five days. Considering that we’ve managed to delay them for the last week, I would call that a victory, wouldn’t you?”

Disciple Nobleman: “That’s right.”

Elder Sister Maid: “The retreat of the Automatons was well-executed too, right?”

Mercenary Survivor: “Holding them off for five days would already be impressive. We’ve provided them with some food, but we’ve managed to conceal the rest of it, and the mines remain closed.”

Resourceful Young Man: “What a splendid bluff.”

Disciple Nobleman: “That’s what diplomacy is about.”

Elder Sister Maid: “It’s not just about bluffing isn’t it? You have to believe in what you’re saying. If you’re unwilling to put your life on the line, you won’t be able to convince them.”

Resourceful Young Man: “That’s very cool, I suppose that’s what they mean when they say if you do not fight you will never have enemies.”

Disciple Nobleman: “My teacher had a similar idea as well.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Well, I can’t say it’s entirely true in practice.”

Mercenary Archer: (*small voice*) “If it’s not true in practice, then that would be troublesome, wouldn’t it?”

Elder Sister Maid: “But I really don’t want to fight those people.”

Disciple Nobleman: “With the Crown Prince Marshal?”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes.”

Disciple Nobleman: “That being said, you’re quite a formidable opponent yourself. I was very much impressed by your intimidation and steadfastness.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Oh, and what about me? Hehe. I impressed, you didn’t I? You love me now don’t you? You want to kiss me right!?”

Elder Sister Maid: “What! No!”

Resourceful Young Man whistles

Disciple Nobleman: “Alright now, really stop with that whistling sound. It is extremely uncool.”

Mercenary Survivor: “And here I thought you were afraid of confronting that Prince.”

Elder Sister Maid: “No, it is scary, but..... It’s no reason for me to hesitate. That is something I just have to do. In the face of an enemy, carrying such naivete would be impermissible. It’s just.....”

Mercenary Survivor: “?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I think that person has his own sense of justice. Even though, my convictions and my route are different from his. However, because of this, I do not have the right to say that his sense of justice is wrong. It might be possible that his sense of justice is better for the world.....”

Disciple Nobleman: “.....”

Elder Sister Maid: “Elder Sister Maid: “I don’t really have the intention to destroy or harm the Holy Crusaders. If possible, I hope that all of the Crusaders can stay alive. If we were able to fight in a different way, that would be best. A different way. When a war is fought, the fight cannot continue. Because one sides is dead. Even if we are enemies, that is not my intention. Don’t you think it’s very lonely? — Why can’t we become friends with the opponent?”

Disciple Nobleman: “.....”

Elder Sister Maid: “What a naïve way of thinking.”

Disciple Nobleman: “No, I can understand.”

Mercenary Survivor: “That’s right.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Really? Because I didn’t understand shit.”

Disciple Nobleman: “You’re probably still young.”

Mercenary Survivor: “Well, we’re mercenaries, so if the battlefield disappeared, we wouldn’t have any food to eat and we would be out of a job. It sure would be difficult without a job and nothing to eat. — But, above that, if we didn’t have this job, we would be undesirable people. That’s why I understand. Undesirable people are born in undesirable places, this is where we belong, but by being here, we keep the rest from it.”

Resourceful Young Man: “Undesirable people?”

Disciple Nobleman: “That guy..... Can be said to be the very framework of the Holy Empire. At present, the Central Kingdoms have had a history too long and unbroken, and severely lack in talented young men. He’s a man who has been called a hero of the people. That way of living is something not easily attainable. That guy also has things he has to defend. Defend the place where you belong, is that really so undesirable?”

——— **The Holy Imperial Palace, a Gloomy Boulevard**

Horse steps.....

Footman: "Sir, we will arrive at the Octagonal Palace after we pass this boulevard."

Young Merchant: "Alright, let's go."

Footman: "Yes, sir."

Horse steps.....

Young Merchant: "How few people."

Young Merchant: (..... This is the pride of the Continent, the grand boulevards of the Holy Imperial City. Well, the streets are pretty and wide. The buildings are splendid, but the gravitas of the people is completely absent....."

Young Merchant: "I suppose it's the smallpox."

Young Merchant: (It appears rumours of the vaccine are spreading. Especially with the economic hardship imposed by the war, the income disparity is becoming evident as well. The serfs are heading to the cities, it seems that the farms are being left untended then."

Horse steps.....

Footman: "Sir, this is the Rose Gate."

Young Merchant: "Yeah."

Young Merchant: (The Church and the guilds which are linked to the Church are monopolising the profit, and this is the result. They have hollowed out an economic bubble and left the landlords to wilt away, but that's the style of the Church..... Well, that's fine too. This too is agreeable to us..... I have very much to do, in the name of the Union."

——— The Holy Imperial City, the Octagonal Palace, the Garden of Winter Roses

"What business would a merchant have in this ancient and honourable palace."

"How unpleasant."

Servant: "This way."

Young Merchant: "Yes."

Footsteps..... Footsteps.....

"That guy is from the Union."

"He can't be a nice guy."

Young Merchant: (What an opulent and luxurious place. Even the corridors are all completely decked out.)

Servant: "Please enter. His Holy Imperial Majesty will be with you shortly."

Young Merchant: "Got it. You got any candy?"

Servant: "Huh?"

Young Merchant: "Just a joke."

Servant: "In that case, please excuse me."

Door opens

Attendant: "Of the Merchant's Union, of the Chambers of Commerce of the Kingdom of the Lake, the Young Merchant."

Young Merchant: "It is my pleasure to meet you. I am the Young Merchant, the leader of the Merchant's Union based in the Kingdom of the Lake. I beg for your grace."

Chief Minister: "Hmm, I am the Chief Minister."

Imperial Bishop: "I am the personal Bishop to the Throne."

Chief Minister: "By the Grace of the Holy Spirit, before you stands his Holy Imperial Majesty the Sixteenth Emperor of the Holy Empire."

Holy Emperor: "Mmm."

Chief Minister: "His Imperial Majesty has agreed to an audience with you."

Young Merchant: (So this is the guy..... He seems troublesome, I suppose we'll need to take drastic measures. But this Emperor.....)

Holy Emperor: "Welcome. I suppose you have come to the Holy Empire for economic and business reasons? It has been a period of austerity which I have been following for a long time. I look forward to today's talk."

Chief Minister: "....."

Young Merchant: "Thank you very much. I have a few things I wish to say today, but..... But first of all, I have a request....."

Holy Emperor: "Go ahead."

Young Merchant: "The Merchant's Union is a coalition of independent merchants. The tradition of the solitary merchant has been transmitted through many generations, and we have constructed Chambers of Commerce in various cities throughout the Continent."

Holy Emperor: "Mmmm."

Young Merchant: “We have also begun a system of issuing letters of credit for ease of currency conveyance. By your grace, this has been well received.”

Holy Emperor: “Letters of credit? Hmm, I understand.”

Young Merchant: “We would be very grateful if we could be designated with an Imperial purveyor license to provide credit.”

Imperial Bishop: “Your Holy Imperial Majesty I must object.”

Holy Emperor: “Why?”

Imperial Bishop: “The management of the institutions of credit has long been the duty of the Holy Church. It is a noble industry powered by the faith and fervour of the masses of adherents throughout the country. To begin with, anything involving money requires immense levels of trust. In particular, depositing currency requires both trust and capital. Letters of credit, letters of loan, no matter what the financial instrument, are completely valueless unless backed by trust in an institutions will and ability to fulfil it. For a new enterprise to enter this industry, that would be nearly impossible.”

Young Merchant: “I beg your pardon, Chief Minister. According to Imperial Law, is it necessary for me to have a license in order to provide letters of credit?”

Chief Minister: “..... Well..... No, not technically.”

Imperial Bishop: “.....”

Young Merchant: “Requesting for an Imperial license is hence purely out of respect.”

Imperial Bishop: “In that case, as the representative of the Holy Church of Light, I impeach your Holy Imperial Majesty. I believe you know that there is no regulation only because it would be ridiculous to challenge the authority of the Church in this industry. In light of this, please adjust the law, no please issue an Imperial edict to ban all financial instruments issued outside of the Church. This is an impassioned plea from the Holy Church of Light.”

Holy Emperor: “.....”

Young Merchant: “In that case, Most Revered.”

Imperial Bishop: “What is it, Merchant. I am speaking to His Imperial Majesty.”

Young Merchant: “Actually, the Merchant’s Union also uses the Church’s letters of credit.”

Imperial Bishop: “Hmph, as expected.”

Young Merchant: “I was intending to exchange my letters for some cash, but when I headed to the Free City of the West Shore, I was told that there is no more cash to be had.”

Imperial Bishop: "That's."

Holy Emperor: "Is that the truth?"

Young Merchant: "I was a bit troubled, so I went to the other Free Cities in the vicinity, but they had run out of cash too."

Imperial Bishop: "....."

Young Merchant: "Actually, I was rejected by five different places. Isn't a letter of credit a *binding document**? Denying withdrawals without regard for the original contract, is that the way the Church operates? The merchants of the West Shore are in a huge uproar now, it's a massive scare."

Holy Emperor: "Is that the truth, Bishop?"

Imperial Bishop: "That, that is..... a temporary....."

Young Merchant: "That is another reason why I have come to see Your Imperial Majesty. I bring with me a petition signed by five thousands merchants from the West Shore. They demand the immediate return of the money that they have deposited in the Church."

Imperial Bishop: "We will definitely be able to return the money."

Young Merchant: "You mean eventually? Please stop joking. We merchants live on a bloody economic battlefield everyday. If we cannot ship our wheat, places literally starve to death. Do you know that there are merchants who cannot buy wheat because their letters of credit are useless? Yet, because of contracts, there are still ships who dock in their docks expecting to be loaded with wheat. Ships are carrying out voyages without cargo, have you thought about the economic damage of that? Trust in the Church? If there was ever such a thing, then perhaps the Church is simply ignoring the trust that we merchants have in the Church."

Imperial Bishop: "All damages will be reimbursed."

Young Merchant: "Do you think trust can be bought back? In that case, we will use money to buy it too. So this is the holy trust in the Church which you were speaking of earlier?"

Imperial Bishop: "Such a thing cannot possibly be bought! How audacious! Heretic!"

Holy Emperor: "Stop now."

Young Merchant: "I apologise for the rudeness."

Imperial Bishop: "Hmph. Rogue."

Holy Emperor: "What should we do?"

Chief Minister: “Your Imperial Majesty, you are the chief of law. Whatever you say is bound directly to law.”

Holy Emperor: “I see. Hmm..... Bishop, first make compensation to everybody involved.”

Imperial Bishop: “Yes.”

Holy Emperor: “Moreover, do you agree that the trust of the merchants of the West Shore has been hurt?”

Imperial Bishop: “If organisms like merchants even have the concept of human trust, then yes.”

Holy Emperor: “Beyond the basic compensation, it would be appropriate to provide a higher recompensation in order to rebuild some of that trust. How much do you think is enough?”

Imperial Bishop: “I believe that 100,000 gold pieces would be enough. Maybe even too much.”

Holy Emperor: “Hmm, what do you think, Young Merchant?”

Young Merchant: “Personally, I feel the amount is more than enough. As expected, the wisdom of the Holy Church is truly infinite. I am at ease.”

Imperial Bishop: “How greedy. Shameless man.”

Young Merchant: “However, as I said earlier, the petition has the names of five thousand merchants on its roster. As such, my personal view is not sufficient. I have a responsibility to inquire, may I suggest that the merchants be provided with an additional recompense of 50% of their reported losses?”

Imperial Bishop: “Very good.”

Young Merchant: “Then, when will they be paid?”

Imperial Bishop: “This is the Holy Imperial City. Tomorrow I will bear a message to the Holy Church and begin the proceedings.”

Young Merchant: “Excellent. I look forward to it.”

Imperial Bishop: “Then our conversation is over.”

Young Merchant: “In that case, the combined compensation amounts to 84 million gold pieces.”

Imperial Bishop: “What?”

Chief Minister: “!?”

Young Merchant: “The face value of the letters of credit on its own is 7 million gold pieces. However, the declared opportunity loss of revenue is eight times that.”

Imperial Bishop: “Where do these numbers come from!?”

Young Merchant: “Are you aware of the price of charcoal now? Charcoal is produced in the Kingdom of Elm and is shipped through the infrastructure in the Kingdom of the Lake, it is now worth sixteen times the original price. The tax regime instituted between the two countries is a business nightmare. All of these losses have been incurred because of a lack of liquid capital, at present this is just half of the story, if we factored in the other business and economic opportunities, the losses may increase to ten times. Will the Church accept it?”

Imperial Bishop: “..... Do as you wish!”

Young Merchant: “In that case, at ten times the declared opportunity loss.....”

Imperial Bishop: “I thought we agreed on eight!”

Young Merchant: “Sure. Then 7 million gold pieces at eight times the opportunity cost results in 56 million gold pieces. With the trust repair compensation of 50%, that amounts to 84 million gold pieces.”

Imperial Bishop: “Damn you.....”

Young Merchant: “Of course, this is just the losses from today. If the compensation cannot be made by the end of the day, then we can expect another round of losses similar to today. In that case..... the amount would be 180 million gold pieces. And after that, it gets difficult. Let me calculate. The next round would be 12.9 billion gold pieces.”

Imperial Bishop: “.....!”

Holy Emperor: “Ahahahahahahaha!”

Imperial Bishop: “Your Imperial Majesty!”

Holy Emperor: “What of it? Would the Holy Church be able to round up all the money in the Holy Imperial City within the next two to three days?”

Imperial Bishop: “This is preposterous! Your Excellency!”

Chief Minister: “..... Hmm?”

Imperial Bishop: “I need to talk to you about the money. Let us talk in private.”

Chief Minister: “Uhh, yes. Your Imperial Majesty. I must take my leave.”

Door slams

Holy Emperor: “Hahahaha! Look! It’s like he took an arrow to his butt!”

Young Merchant: “Hahahaha. Indeed.”

Holy Emperor: "Hahahaha. This is hilarious. I haven't laughed like this since I was a young man."

Young Merchant: "In that case I am glad I could bring some joy to your life."

Holy Emperor: "I know what you did."

Young Merchant: "Yes."

Holy Emperor: "You intend to pursue them for the payment?"

Young Merchant: "No, no. They were very impertinent though. I wonder what they were thinking."

Holy Emperor: "These people are only loyal to their own interests."

Young Merchant: "Mmm."

Holy Emperor: "I am but a normal and uninformed monarch. Merchant, your intelligence is astounding."

Young Merchant: "But you are very important to me."

Holy Emperor: "Me? Oh, the Imperial license. Even if I don't say anything, you would still have forced them to borrow."

Young Merchant: "Borrow?"

Holy Emperor: "Hahaha. Didn't you see the Chief Minister? The Bishop will definitely have to do his best to wrangle up 84 million gold pieces by today. 84 million is no small number, but when you talked about 10 billion that really set his mind racing, the annual value of all the wheat traded in the Continent doesn't even come up to that much. It is truly a stupendous number. For 84 million gold pieces, if we emptied the Church's vaults and my own Imperial Treasury, we might just be able to fulfil it."

Young Merchant: "Imperial Treasury? Is that alright?"

Holy Emperor: "What is?"

Young Merchant: "To order the money to be paid in such a fashion."

Holy Emperor: "Well. This would be good medicine for the two of them. If the medicine is too strong, it might result in the death of those two. But that is a way of cleansing the rust. I would rather it not be divulged, but from the beginning, meddling with the treasury without my express instructions is a capital punishment. As death row criminals, I suppose they will just have to follow what I say."

Young Merchant: "....."

Holy Emperor: "Your methods are certainly very dazzling aren't they?"

Young Merchant: "I do not think so. Your Imperial Majesty has completely seen through my plans. You acted in a prompt and decisive manner to ensure the survival of your country above all else."

Holy Emperor: "Is that so?"

Young Merchant: "Yes."

Holy Emperor: "In that case, I suppose we should go and save those two heartless people."

Young Merchant: "How?"

Holy Emperor: "Merchant, Merchant. You have just managed to land 84 million gold pieces. If you don't give it back in order to fill up the treasury, those two would have committed a capital offence."

Young Merchant: "Yes."

Holy Emperor: "As their lord, I bear the responsibility for the failure of my subordinates. And I would like to request for the 84 million from you."

Young Merchant: "Hoho, a good proposition."

Holy Emperor: "Your aim was probably to get lots of money out of this."

Young Merchant: "Probably."

Holy Emperor: "In that case, perhaps we could come to an arrangement."

Young Merchant: "Hoho."

Holy Emperor: "And, you want some kind of license."

Young Merchant: "Yes."

Holy Emperor: "I'll see what I can do."

Young Merchant: "I understand."

Holy Emperor: "Then, what is it that you want, Merchant?"

Young Merchant: "I want a permit to construct Orders of the Lake in the Imperial City."

Holy Emperor: "....."

Young Merchant: "In addition, all transactions taking place within the Order are to be tax-exempt, and all transactions of the Order are to enjoy the same tax-exempt status as the Holy Church of Light."

Holy Emperor: "That is....."

Young Merchant: “I’m not asking for a differentiation from the Holy Church of Light. It would be fine if they were on the same footing, don’t you think? The monarchy and nobility can continue to visit their traditional Holy Church if they so wish to.”

Holy Emperor: “..... So this is your aim, Merchant?”

Young Merchant: “Of course, I wouldn’t dare to suggest a scenario with no gain to your Imperial Majesty. It’s clear that the Church and the Empire share a close relationship, but within that gap the Holy Order of the Lake could probably fit in. To begin with, we are two different sects with identical beliefs. Think of it as two separate wings, to stabilise the land. That is no small feat.”

Holy Emperor: “That may be so.....”

Young Merchant: “Well that’s just one thing. Now there’s the matter with the letters of credit.”

Holy Emperor: “What else is there!?”

Young Merchant: “The matter I bring before you today is a matter from the Union and friends of the Union. Of course, letters of credit are by no means rare, aren’t they? The Imperial compensation is 8 times with a 50 percent extra, in other words 12 times more than the original sum. If this information were to be leaked out, I fear that all the merchants in the Continent will panic against the Empire and the church. In that case, you can expect ten, no fifty times more complaints than the ones I delivered.”

Holy Emperor nods

Young Merchant: “I believe you understand, but the way to save the Church would be to acquiesce to my demands.” *Smiles*

Explanation

Binding Document: Parties to a binding document are obligated by law to fulfil the terms of the document. The Holy Church issues letters of credit as binding documents in order to oblige merchants to pay them back for loans, but the reverse is also true. In other words, the Church must pay those merchants in possession of binding documents within the terms stated.

——— **The Demon World, the South, the Old Lands of the Pale, a Breezy Hill**

Wind blows

Crown Prince Marshal: “Milady.”

Elder Sister Maid: “Yes.”

Crown Prince Marshal: "Once this fight has been won, I will give way to you."

Elder Sister Maid: "You will retreat?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "Well, I will move backwards. Unfortunately, I do not have the time to engage in fine diplomacy with you. This is your victory."

Mercenary Survivor: (She did it!)

Strategist: "However, the 850 wagons of food and medicine..."

Elder Sister Maid: "Of course, I swear on my honour."

Crown Prince Marshal: "....."

Elder Sister Maid: "....."

Wind blows

Crown Prince Marshal: "Hmm. You should thank the Hero. This was not purely by your effort."

Elder Sister Maid: "Yes. From the beginning it has never been."

The Hero: "Hahaha! The Elder Sister Maid has always ordered me around since a long time ago. And she's got excellent acting skills to boot!"

Elder Sister Maid: "Didn't I apologise for that?"

Crown Prince Marshal: "So do you think this is the end?"

Elder Sister Maid: "I suppose you won't allow me to run now that I've won."

Crown Prince Marshal: "Out of the question. Of course, what other choice would you have anyway."

Elder Sister Maid: "No, your Imperial Highness. If we no longer belong here, we will also go to the City of the Gate."

Crown Prince Marshal: "I definitely won't say I don't welcome that. The Hero and yourself will be the guests of the Crusades."

Elder Sister Maid: "No, that will not be necessary."

Crown Prince Marshal: "?"

Elder Sister Maid: "There is no more need to trouble the Hero. Next, will be..... a battle between your Imperial Highness and myself."

Strategist: "!"

Mercenary Survivor: "What! What is she saying!?"

The Hero: "Hahahaha! Hahahahaha! Amazing!"

Crown Prince Marshal: “You have a big mouth.”

Elder Sister Maid: “I try.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hahahahahahaa!”

Elder Sister Maid: “Let me tell you the truth.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “What?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I am known as the Travelling Scholar. — Of course, that is not just a rumour. I have pursued scholarly pursuits and I have travelled extensively. Actually, I have even been to the Imperial City.”

Crown Prince Marshal: “Hoho.”

Elder Sister Maid: “But, the Travelling Scholar suggest some sort of esotericism. I don’t have this courage, it is a difficult burden to bear.....”

Crown Prince Marshal: “So?”

Elder Sister Maid: “I suppose at the end of the day this title is far too heavy for my shoulders. And so, I believe I should go with an identity more fitting to those who know me like the Hero, even to those who face me, like your Imperial Highness.”

Mercenary Survivor: “—?”

Elder Sister Maid: “My name shall be henceforth known as an impoverished serf girl in the Kingdom of Winter.”

Holy Imperial General: “A serf!?”

Strategist: “Fool!”

Elder Sister Maid: “On top of that, I am just a pathetic, powerless Human girl. However, today, right now, from this moment, I have a greater calling. I am now, a hero. I have decided to save the world. I tread alone on this narrow path.”

——— The Kingdom of the Lake, the Capital, the Headquarters of the Union, Midnight

Young Merchant: “What a strong rain.....”

Young Merchant: (What an unbelievable gale.....)

Young Merchant: (The Holy Order of the Lake has been accepted in the Holy Empire. If possible, I want to construct branches in all the major cities. It would be best to accomplish this before the Primarch returns from the Crusades..... We can then build up Chambers of Commerce in these branches, and even banks as well. In this way, we

can use letters of credit to cover the cost of construction. The leader of the Holy Order of the Lake is quite a trustworthy person after all.)

Young Merchant: (But the pressing matter is the conclusion of the war..... That will require capital. Saving up will have to come over that. But, war.....)

Young Merchant: “Hmm.”

Young Merchant: (Victory and defeat..... Victory and defeat. To begin with, what defines victory? I suppose it would be the complete subjugation of the Demon Race..... It seems that no matter what, the world revolves around attaining complete power. — Subjugation. It seems to be just sleep talk. To begin with, exactly whose goal is it to subjugate the Demon World? What a stupid idea.)

Young Merchant: (The number of royalty and heads of state involved in the Crusades amounts to forty. In order to just get one city each, they would have to conquer 40 cities, and how exactly would they defend their new holdings? There are 300,000 soldiers in the Holy Crusade. Even if all of them were soldiers, that would mean one city can only be garrisoned with 7500 soldiers. How foolish! Can you subjugate an entire city with 7500 soldiers? Dividing those 7500 soldiers to separate borders where victory and defeat is still uncertain, and then split them up further to pursue fleeing Demon soldiers and citizens is just a recipe for them to be annihilated group by group. I can hardly believe the Holy Church and the Crown Prince Marshal wouldn't know that.

They definitely have a separate objective. I fear their ultimate aim is to unify the Central Continent. It's a legend that has been told since the time of the First Crusade. The country which is able to destroy the Demon enemy would make a massive step towards holding power in the Central Continent. However, this flow was halted halfway by a massive change. The Southern Kingdoms, long held to be a loyal bulwark revolted. This revolt was not expected to be within their abilities. It was expected that the South was just a wooden doll without self-consciousness, just a pathetic slave bound to the bidding of their masters in the Central Continent. However, for some reason, that expectation failed.

The South, with its own ideas and determination, formed itself into the Tripartite Economic Union. Wielding independent economic and military ability, they existed outside of the Central Continent. The flow was hence stemmed, and the kingdoms in the Central Continent who sympathised with the South grew in number..... Actually, that last trend was something even we did not expect.)

Young Merchant: “Someone bring some tea..... Well, I guess it's not the time of day where there would be anyone around.”

Young Merchant: (To the Central Continent, any idea of continental unity is merely based on a common enemy. This enemy took the form of the Southern Kingdoms based on a flawed information system, without seeing their real form. Such a pivot resulted in two strategies. The first is to use overwhelming strength and conspiracy to smash the Southern Alliance, especially the three countries which formed the original Tripartite

Union. However, that strategy was frozen in its tracks. — Because of smallpox. It would have been expedient to obliterate the Southern Alliance, but that technology was important. That's probably how it is. The schemes against the Holy Order of the Lake must have been exceptionally fierce. But attempting to use schemes and deception against the Holy Order of the Lake is the wrong idea, they are honest to a fault.)

Young Merchant: "I suppose I'm now one of the comrades of the Hero."

Young Merchant: (Of course, they tried to use military might. However, the Holy Order of the Lake and the Southern Alliance have a completely peaceful attitude. They did not even attempt to contest the Church when they were labelled heretics. The Holy Church then pulled down all Order-related buildings in the countries they still had influence in. Whatever they could not snatch and pillage, they burned and destroyed.

However, on the other hand, in the Southern Alliance, the activities of the Church were left unimpeded. In this manner, by picking a fight with the Southern Alliance, they could not claim to be great and moral. To begin with, by making a proclamation that the South were heretics, they still could take some moral high ground and point their blade at the Southern Kingdoms. In this way, they hoped to break the moral legitimacy of the Southern Kingdoms. However, this strategy underestimated the Southern Alliance, and especially miscalculated the political balance and charisma of the Lone Winter King.)

Young Merchant: (Eventually, the Central Continent had no choice but to directly attack the Southern Alliance. A double danger came from the King of White Night and the Demon invasion, which left the South exhausted and at its weakest. At this point, the Central Continent could carry out their other option, an invasion of the Demon World. Up to this point, I understand their aims. The aim of unifying the Central Continent relies on maintaining a common enemy. But times changed and the enemy was no longer menacing enough. In order to solidify their status, they needed a new incentive, in other words a stronger drive. A bait for the rest to invade the Demon World. That bait was 'new land and unlimited riches in the Demon World'.

However, that was a spectacularly successful bait. By developments in agricultural technology and the defeat of the Demons at the Isle of Light, the production capacity of the Continent indeed increased. Dukes and Kings watched their treasuries grow and their armies expand. With greed in their hearts, the various kingdoms became susceptible to sweet words of greed. No matter how many times they failed, or rather, the more they failed, the more they lusted for new lands and riches with anxiety in their hearts and a ravenous hunger.....)

Young Merchant: "War....."

Young Merchant: (With 300,000 Holy Crusaders, even with splendid weaponry like muskets, consolidating control over the Demon World is absolutely unthinkable. One possibility is for the 300,000 soldiers to seize supplies from the areas they travel through, slaughtering every Demon they come across without reprieve. Moreover, rather than subjugating or conquering cities, they could simply raze them and massacre the population before moving on to the next city. In other words, genocide. However,

doing so would only return desolate lands and would require large amounts of time and expenditure with comparatively little return.

Or, they could capture the cities and suppress the Demons with garrisons. With their strength, they might be able to hold on to five or six cities. That would be preferable to spreading out their strength. In such a wide area, whether two or three hundred thousand, it would be like adding hot water to the sea, the heat would just spread out and dissipate..... In that case, the real goal of the Central Continent is to capture just a few cities, to leave a strong impression on the other kingdoms and entice them as a sort of bait. In this way, the next Crusades can be directed to seize more lands and riches, even in the Southern Alliance..... In that case, the best course of action would be to make the Crusades appear ineffectual, and the Merchant Union's course of action is not wrong. But, even so, there's still that feeling.....)

Young Merchant: "....."

Footsteps

Young Merchant: "?"

Young Merchant: "Who's there?"

Young Merchant: "I don't have any appointments today. At this time of the night, my mind is playing tricks on me, I should just drink some wine and sleep."

Scratching sounds

Fire Dragon Lady: "....."

Young Merchant: "Lady.....?"

Fire Dragon Lady: "....."

Young Merchant: "Teleportation!? Otherwise, how far have you walked..... You're completely soaked! Such heavy rain, and in winter as well? Are you trying to die?"

Fire Dragon Lady: "....."

Young Merchant: "I didn't think you were that kind of person."

Fire Dragon Lady: "..... Save us."

Young Merchant: "Eh?"

Fire Dragon Lady: "Bowing my head to you is not something I enjoy. My chest feels like it is being shredded by broken glass. However, I have something I need to rely on you for..... The City of the Gate is about to fall. You have to help us. Somehow....."

Young Merchant: "....."

Fire Dragon Lady: "The City of the Gate is surrounded by 200,000 Crusaders, enduring ceaseless cannon fire day and night. The Crusaders are pushing the defences with crazed

fervour, attacking without regard for their own lives. Under these circumstances, the City of the Gate has endured well under the command of the Demon King.”

Young Merchant: “The Demon King? The Demon King is in the City?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Yes. The City cannot fall.”

Young Merchant: (Why? Even if it does get captured, taking it back again is not that difficult. I don’t know what it’s like on the field, but I imagine that their supply lines must be very stretched. If they baited the attackers deep into Demon territory, they could just cut off their supplies behind them, right? Or am I misunderstanding this new musket technology?)

Fire Dragon Lady: “The Crusaders are stubbornly pressing the siege, and the City of the Gate has already become the greatest battle in the Demon World. The dead number more than 30,000 already, and the ground has become inundated in blood.....”

Young Merchant: “The Crown Prince Marshal.....”

Fire Dragon Lady: “It seems that the enemy general known as the Crown Prince Marshal departed for another location with an army of 50,000 before the battle began. We do not know where he is.....”

Young Merchant: (The Crown Prince is not with the 150,000 strong Imperial Army?)

Fire Dragon Lady: “.....”

Young Merchant: “Where is the Shrewd Accountant?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “He retreated.”

Young Merchant: “I see. That makes sense since I did issue instructions to retreat. Then why did you stay?”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Because I am a Lady of the Tribe of Dragons.”

Young Merchant: “.....”

Fire Dragon Lady: “I cannot possibly leave my comrades behind.”

Young Merchant: “I..... see. I apologise. I issued instructions to retreat without considering your situation.”

Fire Dragon Lady: “..... The Shrewd Accountant, the Middle Aged Merchant and the other employees retreated to my father’s domain when the battle began.”

Young Merchant: “.....”

Fire Dragon Lady: “You have to help us.”

Young Merchant: “I’m a merchant. I have no army.”

Fire Dragon Lady: "Even so."

Young Merchant: "I can't."

Fire Dragon Lady: "You need a reward? If you need a reward, anything will do. As long as I have it, you may have it."

Young Merchant: "If you intend to walk the path of the Merchant, saying 'anything' is definitely not the way to go."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Then I suppose I cannot walk the path of the Merchant."

Young Merchant: "....."

Fire Dragon Lady: "I am happy to have seen the world together with you. Buying iron here, selling salt there. Travelling to places I have never seen, meeting people I have never met, negotiating, attempting to find compromise. Seeking mutual benefit, considering unknown bargains. That has all been very, very fun. You opened my eyes to the narrow world I had been born in.

But, I am a Lady of the Tribe of Dragons. I cannot betray my ancestors. And..... I love the City of the Gate. It's a grungy city which is so charming, where Humans and Demons live together. It's not a playground, it's a place where trickery and scams are commonplace. But it's an everchanging City, where all the people are free and control their own futures.

What you said was painful. A sad song is playing in the recesses of my heart. I thought you would at least treat me as a business partner. If you would allow me..... At least let me understand how you feel. Perhaps you scorn such a naïve, weak-hearted and fickle person as myself. If that is the case, allow me to beg you, on my knees if I have to. I hate to beg, but I really, really need you to help us. That is what hurts me. Even so, I don't have a lot I can give you, and if you find me disdainful....."

Young Merchant: "I don't want to hear it."

Fire Dragon Lady: "Is that..... so....."

Young Merchant: "The Demon World is not going to be subjugated by the Holy Crusaders. Even if five or ten Demon cities are conquered, the market is not going to be tremendously shaken by it. This is just the beginning of a threeway economic relationship between the Holy Empire with the Holy Church at its core, the Southern Alliance and now, the Demon World; a brand new world."

Fire Dragon Lady: "....."

Young Merchant: "That is something that the Merchant Union and myself aims to achieve. In that world, merchants like us would be able to move freely within this economic and cultural relationship, our financial influence would expand tenfold. Why is it that the Demon King is unwilling to let go of the City of the Gate?"

Fire Dragon Lady: “I do not know..... She just says it’s for the future. That it’s for the pride of the Demons and for the sake of the Humans.”

Young Merchant: “The Demon King said that?”

Fire Dragon Lady nods

Young Merchant: (Did we misappraise the value of that city? Does it have some kind of military or economic value I am unfamiliar with? No, that would be hard to imagine. In that case, maybe cultural or religious..... Or perhaps it has some kind of symbolic value? — What’s the likelihood of that? Why would losing the City be such a big deal..... What do you lose if you lose the City? Why would the Demon King go to the City at such a time and defend it to the death?)

Fire Dragon Lady: “.....”

Young Merchant: (For the sake of the Humans, she said?)

Young Merchant: “!”

Fire Dragon Lady: “Merchant?”

Young Merchant: “The Demon King! Her eyes are red, right!? Like freshly pressed wine!?”

——— **Epilogue**

With two feelings, the Hero made his way to you.

From her green casket, she watched over the material world in her eternal slumber, gazing down onto the altar. That was a promise. A vow. The place where the contract would be fulfilled.

This time she continued to hope, this time more so, she hoped.

Years and months passed, comparable to infinity, but even so, like a glowing ember, a shadow stayed in her heart, with black hair and black eyes. Calling her name with a soft voice. She loved only once, she loved only one youth.

With a despair that could not possibly happen a second time, she longed crazily to love again. It was a dilemma, and her fragile feelings wavered like a pane of glass in the wind.

The determinations of that youth was another thing which she loved.

The desire to save the world, to embrace the earth.

Save me please. Hero.

As the words left her lips, they dissipated like flower petals in the breeze. They left a sweet touch on her lips as they softly escaped into the light.

Into this world filled with hurt.

She could no longer distinguish whether the steadily burning pulses of pain were borne by the world, or by herself.

In these impure surroundings.

But, because of this, she prayed and wished. She hoped for the salvation of the world, and for that chance meeting that would penetrate eternity.

(Heat.....?)

She began to feel, like the prickling of several needles, the heat of a flame.

Like shimmering fallen stars shining against the black floor, she held both déjà vu and jamais vu. That flame, was herself. A small flame which flickered and wavered on the ground..... She too sometimes shone, sometimes wavered, and sometimes she danced as she thought of that black-haired Hero saving the world, and his distinct features.

She continued to watch these movements, entranced.

She longed to meet him again, in her own identity, and longed for another chance encounter. She did not know exactly what she meant by that, but like a girl possessed, she concentrated hard as she stared at the ground.

Maps and Explanations

——— The Third Crusade, the First Battle of the City of the Gate

The 43rd Demon King, Ruby Eyes, has seen many victories on the battlefield, but has naturally seen many defeats as well. Among these, the greatest defeat would be the First Siege of the City of the Gate during the Third Crusade. In the war between quality and quantity, quantity was the one which one this particular battle.

The Demon Race, or at least those members of the Demon Race which took to the battlefield each had martial ability far exceeding that of the average Human. In a battle of equal numbers between Demons and Humans, there would be no possibility for the Demons to be defeated.

In response, the strength of the Humans lay in their numbers. The Human Race, who each had many children, had a population far exceeding that of the Demon Race. The Southern Kingdoms alone had a population rivalling that of the entire Demon World. With the addition of the Central Continent, the Human World outnumbered the Demon World ten to one.

The Humans, with the Central Continent based about the Holy Empire committed almost their entire army to the establishment of the Third Crusades. For the paranoid kingdoms of the Continent to fight alongside each other and form a grand army like the Crusades relied on solid foundation of faith and the authority of the Holy Church. Ensuring the security of their countries while their entire armies were on the expedition demonstrated the success of the mutual supervision system which was built.

Bishops from the Holy Church as well as armistice-observing military officers from each of the other countries were sent to every country in order to observe and ensure that each country maintained the lowest numbers of soldiers necessary for training and the preservation of peace.

In response to this, the Central Continent kept its military strength at its lowest, directing the majority of its strength against the Demon Race to achieve victory.

The concept of operations was as follows:

1. Start of the Battle

The campaign began when the garrison in the City of the Gate sallied out to engage the Vanguard forces of the Holy Crusaders. The Vanguard itself was a far larger force than the Holy Crusaders, and being armed with powerful muskets, they were able to suppress the Demon Army.

2. Middle of the Battle

At this point, the Fiend cavalry levelled their spears and broke off from the main force to engage the Vanguard on its flanks in order to throw the vanguard into chaos. Within this chaos, the Human Army was unable to use its muskets, allowing the Demon Army to preserve as much of its strength as possible.

However, the commander of the Crusaders, the Ash Green King was able to read the intentions of the Demon Army. In response to the manoeuvre, he used an overwhelmingly large force to blunt the blow.

The Fiend cavalry employed illusionary magic in order to obscure their positions and make it difficult for the Human musketeers to aim at them. However, to begin with, Crusader musketeers were never trained to fire with accuracy. The most they could accomplish was to fire in a general direction.

To solve this issue, the Crusaders employed massive numbers of muskets firing in a general direction. The musketeers focussed on firing in the direction of the cavalry, and naturally, most of them missed. However, aggregating all of this low accuracy fire meant that at least one shot would hit. Even if only one in one hundred shots hit their targets, with ten thousand muskets, that meant that hundred casualties would be sustained per volley. With less than 1,000 cavalymen, the Fiend cavalry found their forces gradually attritted volley by volley.

For this reason, the Demon Army's strategy failed and the Vanguard was able to maintain order and stand up to the Demon Army. Moreover, with the addition of cannon fire from the Crusader Grand Army, the Demon Army was thrown into chaos. At this point, it appeared that the utter annihilation of the Demon Army was just a matter of time.

3. End of the Battle

The final twist to the battle was the sudden attack from the rear of the Crusader Army by the combined armies of the Tribes of Beasts and the Tribe of the Gate.

In order to avoid musketfire, they forced themselves into the opening between the Right Wing and the Grand Army of the Crusader Army. In order to avoid shooting their compatriots, the musketeers were unable to direct their fire at the combined army. Left with no choice, the Hundred Paladins rode to intercept the enemy.

By employing even this limited level of disorder among the Demon Army, the Demon King was able to regroup the shattered Demon Army and retreat towards the City of the Gate. However, losses were great, and the Khan of Beasts, the Silver Tiger Lord, was sacrificed in this battle.

From a fragment of historical records in a forgotten library

----- The New Star Fortifications

With the appearance of muskets and cannons on the battlefield, fortification construction theory experienced a radical change. The specific introduction of cannons able to deliver great volumes of high-impact artillery fire necessitated a fundamental shift in the concept of fortified defence.

In response to this new weapon, a new fortification in the form of the Star Fort was developed. The Goryōkaku in Hakodate on the island of Hokkaido to the north of Japan is great example of such fortifications. *(Scribe annotations: Hakodate, Hokkaido and Japan are not places which exist in the entire Continent. Goryokaku is also no fortification known to anybody in either the Demon or Human World. Since this was all written by the Crimson Scholar, perhaps she mixed up the names with some other place.)*

Of course, even before this, similar weapons have continued to exist. The musket had its counterpart in the bow and crossbow, while the cannon had its counterpart in the catapult.

However, the catapult was substantially larger and less mobile. Moreover, compared to explosively discharging metal blocks at high velocities, catapults were substantially slower and hence had less destructive power. In this manner, the erection of walls served a distinct purpose.

However, with the introduction of cannons, the old curtain wall, a straight vertical wall, was simply unable to withstand any sort of protracted bombardment. This was proven true in many engagements.

As such, walls were built to withstand cannonfire without crumbling, by making them lower and thicker. At this point, rather than walls, the fortifications were designed primarily to absorb and deflect the impact of the cannons.

Such low-height walls were also useful against musket fire.

While bows were capable of direct fire (firing in a straight line towards the enemy), they were primarily designed for indirect fire (firing in an arc towards the enemy).

As a result, using indirect fire, archers were able to pick off enemies hiding within fortifications. Of course, in response to that, soldiers learnt to put shields above their heads to block arrows.

In contrast, muskets fired exclusively straight.

Older fortifications relied on pushing down siege ladders erected on walls to prevent enemy soldiers from climbing in, on dropping rubble and large stones and on pouring scalding water on enemies below.

However, the newer fortifications relied on standing on thin boards (which resulted in them being unable to move freely) and firing with muskets on enemies in safety while enemies were unable to fire back.

Constructing this sort of fortification required a higher level of engineering and architectural skill. The square forts which had been constructed up to now were gradually replaced by star forts. Compared to square forts, longer lines of walls needed to be constructed, which represented increased costs and time required. However, despite the cost, star forts offered many advantages.

The old style forts used to shortest distance of walls to cover the area, and if necessary, could be constructed to have several corners to increase the length. However, the walls were overwhelmingly straight, and would absorb the brunt of cannon fire, leading to them absorbing great damage with each shot.

The new fortifications were constructed with sloping walls, such that even while surrounded by cannon emplacements, they would suffer significantly less damage. In addition, as the different walls of the star fort faced each other, defensive fire from the defenders would form overlapping fields and hence result in the greatest damage on attackers attempting to siege the walls from the front.

In other words, attackers faced the troubling dilemma of deciding between a strategy which yielded minimum damage and a strategy which would result in maximum casualties for the attacker.

The very first Star Fortification constructed in history was the defences of the City of the Gate. This star fortification proved to be instrumental in the Second Battle of the City of the Gate, or the Siege of the City of the Gate, and was later greatly expanded. Without the star fort, the walls of the City of the Gate would have fallen almost immediately and would immediately have been occupied by large hordes of Holy Crusaders.

However, the chief architect and engineer of the star fortifications argued, “Even though the low-height fortifications were my idea; however, the star shape was created by simply reconstructing the old fortifications which previously existed in the City of the Gate. They were not my invention.”

To think that the City of the Gate, a city so ancient that no written records exist of its history, once had a genius capable of designing such defensive infrastructure. This is a mystery of history which persists even to this day.

From <A History of Forts and Ditches> by the Crimson Scholar

——— **The Disciple Merchant’s Lecture on Cheese**

Disciple Soldier: “It’s been a long time. I came to the city and I heard you were here so I came to see you.”

Disciple Merchant: “Oh, it’s really been a very long time. You must be very busy as the Minister for Defence.”

Disciple Soldier: “I really have. I’ve been surrounded by books all day. Had it not been for the training we received from our teacher, I think I would have burnt out by now.”

Disciple Merchant: “I’m very much the same. I’m a bureaucrat and I’ve also got to deal with this mountain of materials.”

Disciple Soldier: “Is that something you should be saying?”

Disciple Merchant: “The new cheese bank has been on the top of my mind.”

Disciple Soldier: “What’s a cheese bank?”

Disciple Merchant: “Hmm, how should I explain this? Do you know how cheese is made?”

Disciple Soldier: “Not at all. I know it’s made from milk somehow.”

Disciple Merchant: “First, you add something called *rennet** to milk. After that, by removing the *whey** which floats to the top, you separate the solids.”

Disciple Soldier: “Ohh, I see.”

Disciple Merchant: “After that, you dispose of the whey. Well, actually you don’t throw it away, whey does have its uses, but let’s leave that aside for now.”

Disciple Soldier: “Mmhmm.”

Disciple Merchant: “Then, you gather up the solids left behind and when it fully solidifies, that’s fresh cheese.”

Disciple Soldier: “Ohh, and that’s how you get cheese like mascaporne and mozzarella. It’s most delicious when spread on bread.”

Disciple Merchant: “That’s right. But actually, the real cheese production starts now.”

Disciple Soldier: “Ohh, so fresh cheese and cheese are different things.”

Disciple Merchant: “Solidifying cheese is not an easy process. Alongside using yeast-aided fermentation, it needs to rest for a few months.”

Disciple Soldier: “It takes that much time?”

Disciple Merchant: “That’s right. And sometimes if the maturation fails, it becomes inedible.”

Disciple Soldier: “Well, I suppose that’s why cheese is so expensive.”

Disciple Merchant: “And hence the cheese bank.”

Disciple Soldier: “Are you going to tell me what that is?”

Disciple Merchant: “The idea is to buy cheese in its pre-solidified phase for 60% of its sale price and then keep it under ideal maturation conditions in a proper facility for a few months.”

Disciple Soldier: “Won’t that come at a loss to them?”

Disciple Merchant: “Of course, if you think of it as just waiting for a few months before it matures, then there is definitely a loss. However to the people who make the cheese, that’s not how it works.”

Disciple Soldier: “What do you mean?”

Disciple Merchant: “Firstly, they don’t have to worry about the failure or success of the maturation process. The chance of failure is hence zero.”

Disciple Soldier: “Failure would definitely be a huge loss.”

Disciple Merchant: “That’s right. But to these cheese producers, in return for slightly lower profits, they significantly lower their risk and stabilise their income. Our teacher calls this risk management.”

Disciple Soldier: “Once again, she uses some kind of obscure terminology. I can see how this is helpful, but it can’t be worth 40% of the price.”

Disciple Merchant: “No, the biggest advantage is immediately receiving payment. In this way, the money can very quickly be rechannelled into the second production phase to produce even more cheese. Our teacher calls this an improvement to the *rate of turnover**.”

Disciple Soldier: “I see. Revenue gets back to them quicker so the next production cycle can begin earlier and in the end they make more profit in the same period of time.”

Disciple Merchant: “Exactly. It becomes a lot more busy, but to a cheese producer, this allows them to build savings quicker.”

Disciple Soldier: “But would the cheese bank be able to handle so much? During the period where the cheese is stored, the cheese bank makes a loss doesn’t it?”

Disciple Merchant: “That’s where the idea comes in. If you think about it, by keeping it for just a few months and checking on it every now and then, the cheese bank can make a 40% profit when the cheese is sold.”

Disciple Soldier: “But surely the production can still fail at this point.”

Disciple Merchant: “Precisely. However, the cheese bank is a place where huge amounts of cheese are stored. As a result, even an extreme failure would see maybe 10% of the cheese spoil. However, even then the overall profit would still be 30%. Of course, that is without paying for management fees and wages of the employees, so not all of it is profit.”

Disciple Soldier: “I see. The cheese producers and the cheese bank both make profit out of this.”

Disciple Merchant: “On top of that, since large profit margins are being made, the market becomes more competitive, more people will try to make cheese, and that means that the price of cheese will go down substantially.”

Disciple Soldier: “Oh that would be great. I do love cheese.”

Disciple Merchant: “On top of that, since all the cheese is in one place, it would be much more convenient to buy cheese as well.”

Disciple Soldier: “This seems like a better and better idea. Cheese is a very healthy thing. If the children of the Southern Kingdoms eat more cheese then the Army of Metal will definitely have stronger recruits.”

Disciple Merchant: “This is something I heard from our teacher, but that relationship is known as a *positive externality**.”

Disciple Soldier: “That sounds sophisticated.”

Disciple Merchant: “It sure would be great if each country in the Southern Alliance was able to reap positive externalities from each other.”

Explanation

Translator Note: The author uses some very strange (and definitely not official) economic terminology to describe the economic phenomena explained here. As an Economics student, I took the liberty of putting everything into proper terminology.

Rennet: Rennet is a complex enzyme traditionally which has the effect of curdling milk. The best rennet is obtained from the gut of young calves, however rennet may also be obtained from plants like thistle and nettles.

Whey: Whey is a by-product of the cheese making process but it is also a healthy food rich in proteins and low in fat. It is often added to the drinking water of pigs to make them healthier and tastier.

Rate of Turnover: As a measure of investment productivity, it refers to the number of times an investment cycle is completed a year. If an investment reaps its benefits in 2 months, then it will reap 6 cycles a year for a 600% rate of turnover. If you compared a 1000¥ investment yielding 2000¥ after one year, with a 1000¥ investment yielding 1100¥ after one month, you would find that the latter investment results in 2200¥ after one year. Hence, multiple short-term turnovers is generally held to be more profitable than single long-term turnovers.

Positive Externality: A positive externality is a benefit enjoyed by a third-party as a result of an economic transaction which the third party does not bear the cost for. In this case, the Army of Metal benefits from having stronger soldiers despite having nothing to do with cheese production. Contrary to common sense, the presence of a positive externality suggests that the market is not producing at an optimum level and more of the given good should be consumed.
